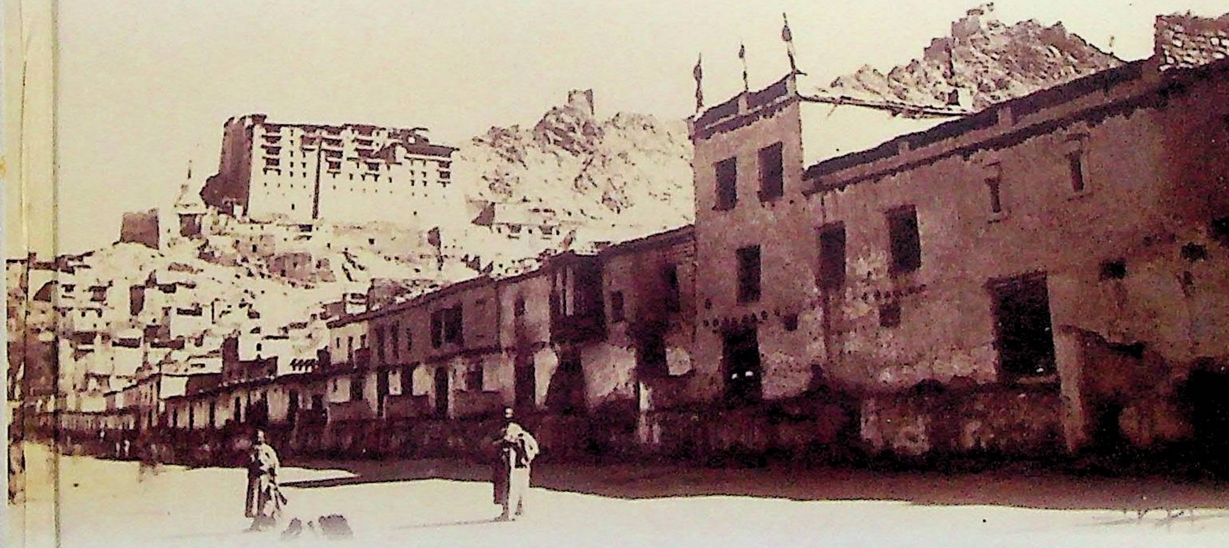
On the edge of the World

Travels in KASHMIR & CENTRAL ASIA



EDMUND CANDLER

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Travels in Kashmir and Central Asia

Edmund Candler

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On the Edge of the World *-Travels in Kashmir & Central Asia*
Edmund Candler

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ISBN : 978-81-8339-207-5

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First Published in London by Cassell & Co in 1919. Reprinted by Gulshan Books (2013) under Copyright Act 1957 and Information Technology Act 2000.

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Gulshan
BOOKS
RESIDENCY ROAD SRINAGAR- 190001 KASHMIR INDIA
www.gulshanbooks.net, www.gulshanbooks.com
For orders and customer service enquiries: gulshanpub@rediffmail.com
Published by Sheikh Ajaz for Gulshan Books
email:chairmangulshan@gmail.com

Distributor:
Sheikh Mohammad Usman & Sons
Booksellers, Publishers and Distributors
Residency Road Srinagar-190001, Kashmir.
Branch Office:
Madina Chowk, Exchange Road, Srinagar-190001, Kashmir.

printed at Chaman Enterprises, New Delhi.

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Preface and Dedication

The first two-thirds of this book were written before the war, the last third in Mesopotamia, where, every summer, the heat is so intense that it compels a natural armistice. Operations of war sometimes took us into the hills, but this was generally in the cold weather. Those who escaped after May from the fire pit on the Tigris to the Zagros range in Persia, who camped under the snowy peaks of Perau and Bisotun or who beheld distant Demavend, were doubly blessed. For a sojourn in the accursed Biblical land will have made any love they may have had for the mountains so much the stronger.

I dedicate this book to my Friends in Mesopotamia in the hope that it may carry their spirits away to cool places and that the day may soon come when they will have

> "No cause to set their dreaming eyes,
> Like Arabs, on fresh streams in Paradise."

Edmund Candler

1

TO AMARNATH AND GANGABAL

AMARNATH

I

Amarnath and Gangabal lie in the mountains at the back of Kashmir.

Amarnath, the sacred cave, is twenty-three marches from Rawalpindi in the plains and Gangabal, the sacred lake, eighteen. They are six days distant from each other and more when the snow; bridges are broken. Gangabal is a domestic pilgrimage. The Hindus of Kashmir carry the knuckle-bones of the dead there and throw them into the lake. Amarnath has a wider call. The cave is Siva's mansion, a Titan's dwelling-place. His roof is a seventeen thousand foot peak, which thrusts a jagged flank into Ladakh. The god and his spouse Parvati dwell within, congealed in two frozen green springs which spurt from the rock. These are the First Cause the genesis of Energy, the primal lingams in which the Essence of Shiv resides, the natural altar of his priests, though Amarnath, save at the time of the great pilgrimage, is a priestless shrine.

The Hindus believe that the ice-lingams increase and decrease with the moon. So when the orb is full in Sawan, in middle August, the spring-tide, as it were, of the plastic spirit which informs all life, they swarm to the cave in hordes from every corner of Hindustan, whether in some vague general hope of merit or drawn by some particular need–the craving for offspring perhaps, for the long-denied son who will lay them on the ground when they come to die.

The road is rough for the Sadhu, a true path to merit. His impulse is not ours. It was the fashion among them to grumble at the clear spring-water and the sweet scent of the flowers, to which they attributed many unfamiliar ills, pain and giddiness and shortness of breath and mountain sickness. Their gaze, was mostly on the ground or fixed on the sky-line. It did not wander. They had no eyes for the changing colours of the hills. They were aware, I think, of a certain savage grandeur all round, in which it was proper that the god should dwell and into which if man intruded it must be with submissive awe and in a spirit of appeasement and propitiation.

The Hindu has none of our waste energies and no real interests, as we understand them, save what he acquires by contact with us. Work, family and devotions fill his life. The aesthetic impulse is dead in him, but he still has a hankering for the marvellous. The West sees God's hand most clearly in what is beautiful; the East, in what is or seems to be, supernormal. The two quests often lead along the same road. So it is on a pilgrimage that East and West are nearest meeting. Even so they do not meet, but move in close parallel lines.

If they follow the same star there is the difference of a hemisphere in the parallax.

I caught up the main camp at Pahalgam in the Liddar valley, nineteen marches into the hills from Rawalpindi and four from the cave. Here the pilgrims were herded by the Kashmir State officials. The Maharaja had spent a lakh of rupees on the pilgrimage. Everyone was given firewood and grass shoes. Grain transport was organised. The sick were given palanquins or carried in baskets on coolies' backs. A hospital tent and a doctor went with them, camping at every stage. Unnani hakims, physicians of the old style, attended those who refused European drugs. And there was need of precaution, for there is no shelter by the road and in the last stages no fuel. Torrents of rain sometimes fall for a week air a time. In bad years hundreds die of cholera and pneumonia and dysentery and fever.

There was no transport for sahibs. Five thousand coolies had been called in for the pilgrims alone. Phillips, a cheery young subaltern who had been hung up ten days at Pahalgam, joined camp with me here. I understood that there was a 54-inch markhor waiting for him somewhere in Ladakh. In the meanwhile he had his banjo and his sketch-book and his spirits did not suffer. We would have got up somehow if we had been set on it, but the pilgrims were not savoury neighbours and I confess I had no stomach for the twice-contaminated road. We would miss the impressive arrival at Amarnath, but we would meet the Sadhus coming and going and we would camp by the cave in its solitary grandeur, alone with the god.

Also I had a feeling that the transport crux was deliberate. It would have been easy enough to find us coolies. The truth is they did not want us. And no wonder! The chill of a sceptical, inquisitive eye is colder than ice. And we, the uninitiated, could not have been happy peeping at their mysteries, prying into their intimate rites.

On the morning they left Pahalgam there was a battle among the Sannyasis, which almost came to a bout with staves. One flag only is carried on the pilgrimage to Amarnath and it entitles the standard-bearer to a third of the pilgrims offerings. For years the privilege has fallen to the Shivaites of Bhairon Asthan in Srinagar, but the Mahunt of a rival temple, the shrine of Mahadeva on the Takht-i-Sulaiman, claimed that his followers were more numerous. He had carried his banner far through sun and rain and he swore by all the attributes of Siva he would not leave it behind. When he drove his little standard in the ground, the others protested with loud cries and the two parties met in the streamlet which separated their camps, shouting and waving their staves. The magistrate of the pilgrims rode up on his ambling tat and in the middle of hearing both sides declared in favour of the Bhairon Asthan party. It was the order of the Maharaja of Kashmir that they should carry the standard as before and that there should be no other flag.

The Takht Sannyasis boded foul weather and disease if the Bhairon flag advanced. The Bhairon party threatened some special visitation if the unorthodox standard was raised, where at the Takht priest cried out angrily:

"Under what provocation, then, has the cholera goddess scourged the camp in past years?"

One of the others struck at him with his staff, but a bearded khaki-clad Mussalman of the Maharaja's police intercepted the blow and pushed the scowling Sannyasi aside. He threatened to go back. Thus a scourge would fall upon the pilgrims.

"It will be ill for those who disobey the orders of the Maharaj Adhiraj," the magistrate said as he rode away. And the defeated Shivaites retired to their camp with sullen murmurs. The sun stood high over the valley between the cliffs and the last of the Maharaja's camp-followers had filed by when they rose sulkily and followed in the track towards the snows.

We waited for the pilgrimage a little way up the road the morning they left Pahalgam and found ourselves jammed in a crowd of holy men—all the twelve sects of Siva and Sitaramis and Bairagis and other orders of Vishnu, more than the god has incarnations.

The back view of a Sannyasi in the early morning is a pair of ashy, naked legs, a little cloth an inch wide passing between them as a protest against decency and perhaps a small blanket thrown over the shoulders to the middle of this cloth and a light peroxide wig of ropy texture crowning all, which, if it were a shade finer, might belong to an impoverished lodging-house lady in Vauxhall.

And the step of the man is often light and airy and his carriage proud and he walks with more than the assurance of the clothed and cane-twirling materialist of Piccadilly, so that the happy subaltern who has got his full second leave and meets him one morning on the pine-scented road to Ladakh, cannot resist the greeting—especially if the Yogi is "sky-clad"[1]—of "Hallo, Sadhuji, are you cold?" At which the irreverent wayfarers, pious and otherwise, smile.

But the Yogi is sky-communing or perhaps uplifted with *bhang and* he passes by unfalteringly, without a turn of the head.

The soldier boy, happy and unsnubbable, calls after him cheerily in English:

"Well, good-bye. I hope you win have a good time."

But the holy man passes on to his spiritual week-end, purchased with what travail he alone knows—perhaps with months of wandering from Ramesvaram or Jagganath, his nose tilted to the sky-line and his wits guarded by piety or drugs from every distraction of the roadside.

Phillips, as they would say in his regiment, is by way of being a Sahib and he would not chaff a man for his religious convictions. But the pilgrim was a palpable automaton. The subaltern would have described him unthinkingly at a glance as a "pro." There were hundreds like him on the road, who make the propitiation of the unseen a kind of trade and who play upon the Hindu's attraction for the grotesque as a means of livelihood. You would not find a trace of anything spiritual or unselfish or spontaneous in the face of any one of them.

But now and then you saw an expression in a face, perhaps in one of five hundred, which told you clearly that the man had come in response to some inward longing. Such a pilgrim the Sahib greets respectfully, seeing the quest in his eyes or the peace it has brought.

Roughly speaking, the pilgrims were of three kinds—professionals who make a living by it, mummers and charlatans and mendicants and clowns, with a sprinkling of genuine searchers after truth; family pilgrims, fathers and mothers and childless ones, men and women in some need or seeking to wipe out some stain; men who had renounced the world wholly or temporarily, like the old subadar who told us that he had lived all his years for his belly and now, as the end drew near, had come to think of his soul, for the health of which he was going to every holy place, as an ailing man to his baths and physicians.

The pick of them all or, perhaps I ought to say, those that were most drawn to us, feeling easy and homelike and sure of sympathy and so more friendly and communicative, were the old soldiers. There was a Sikh of the Nirmali sect, with the eyes of a mediaeval saint or Templar, whom I saw gazing at the jagged limestone rocks above Pahalgam, with their criss-cross veins of snow, as if the lights that played over them beckoned him to some goal. He had been in a Pioneer regiment and fought in Waziristan and Chitral and Tibet. He loved wandering for its own sake, like an Englishman. After the pilgrimage he was going to the Delhi Durbar and afterwards perhaps to Pasupatinath in Nepal or Jagganath Puri. He wore a long, bright-embroidered, saffron robe which was always clean. Packed in among that ash-coloured crew between the cliff and the stream, he looked like a lily in a muddy pool.

There were many women on the road, veiled and unveiled, according to their birth or years or—as it often seems to cynical European eyes—their fascinations. The rich had palanquins. The poorer ones, plain and weather-beaten, rode astride on baggage ponies or walked. There was a stalwart Punjabi woman wearing the blue accordion-pleated skirt with the red hem of the north. She carried one little girl on her shoulder and another larger little girl half ran beside her and held an umbrella over both. The infants on the road were nearly all little girls. The male child, perhaps, would be the fruit of the pilgrimage.

Now and then a family passed who had the air of taking an outing. In one narrow bend of the road a burgher of Delhi with his wife and his old aunt and his sons and daughters blocked the way. The family had three light palanquins, red campanula-shaped awnings laid across two poles. The youngest little girl lay asleep in a basket on a coolie's back. A cow had fallen down the bank to the edge of the torrent and this pleasant, pursy, consequential-looking man explained that he had offered a reward to have it hauled up. Phillips was just in time to lend a hand to the rope.

I talked with the merchant, who told me that his aunt, the stern old lady in the palanquin, the only one unveiled, was the widow of "a colonel," a great bahadur who had fought for us in the Mutiny and acquired much land and consideration. In the meanwhile the cow's dejected head appeared over the bank. The citizen had no change. He held out his rupee a little ostentatiously. All the world saw the largess and understood that he was a pious man. But assessment, was complicated; there had been many hands and no particular initiative. Phillips solemnly received the coin and put it in his pocket with the absentminded air of the independent cabman who takes his due without comment. I was watching the old aunt and enjoyed her look of horror and bewilderment. Soon a slow smile crept over her wrinkled old face, like a light shadow on a rock. She was "slow at the uptak."

III

In four days, when the moon had waxed full and the god in the cave had swollen proportionately and the ceremony was over and the pilgrims returning, the state officials found us transport.

We met the pilgrims at Tanin. Their camp lay at the junction of two narrow gorges where the crags meet high above the stream like huge natural gates. Beautiful glades of maple and pine and silver birch hung over them and the freshness of this delicate orchard-like greenery folded in the titanic arms of the cliff, underneath the naked limestone, with the snows glistening over all, appealed to me more than anything I had seen up to that time in Kashmir, though no doubt the thought of the pilgrims encamped there lent an element of romance which helped to complete the spell.

I sat on a snow bridge in the nullah leading to Shisha Nag and looked down on it all. At twilight the camp-fires began to twinkle in the trees. The straight black pines stood out in a weird, spectral light and the grey smoke rose up between them in tall columns like the wraiths of trees dead. When night had fallen they still stood side by side, vertical shafts of darkness with their ghostly attendants, one little more substantial than the other. Then the moon rose and one only saw a mist among trees. The grey rocks above became silvered like snows far away, the same dull argent as the stream. High up the masts of the pines were etched against the cliff. Human figures kept moving by the camp-fires, rising and stooping over them, but all sound was merged in the everlasting roar of the torrent.

In this dimlighted glen under the crags the strangest human miscellany were falling asleep or thinking of the needs of the moment or of eternity – ecstatic Sannyasis, steeped in Vedic law; naked ash-strewn Yogis in their spiritual trance; clownish Bairagis and vagabonds sunk in a drunken sleep; peaceful, gentle Sadhus; ascetics who have renounced even speech; homely, comfortable folk, to whom this quest is the one adventure of their lives; simple peasants who have never before left their homes, childless perhaps and trusting to that cold stalactite for a son; wanderers who pass their lives in pilgrimage from Ramesvaram by Adam's Bridge to far Kedarnath and Badrinath and the shrine of Krishna at Dwarka and the temple of Kali at Hingalaj in Baluchistan.

It would have been interesting to read their night thoughts. Most of them believed that the lingam in which the essence of the god resides waxed and waned with the moon and many believed that they would have heirs if they approached and touched it. There were Maharanis in the camp, of ancient line, who must have lain awake for hours under the silver birches in hope and doubt.

In the morning I visited the camp before the pilgrims had left. The Sadhus were all gathered about their fires, sitting under their umbrellas or strips of cloth and blanket stretched across three sticks which served them as a tent. Some were cooking their rice; others wrapped in lofty contemplation; others observant, pleased with the interest they caused and ready to be communicative. I had always wanted to see the badges of pilgrimage they wore and it was not likely I should meet a more travelled crowd. For it is a strong flame that draws the spirit to Amarnath, as the path is long and the hardships great and I knew, the pilgrims who had trodden the road must have visited many shrines.

I searched for a man who was not too proud or sullen or spiritually aloof or physically repulsive and I came upon a swart, dwarfish creature who was loitering on the road and watching me with interest. He looked like a Purbiah syce, a drudge from the cradle. There was nothing about him, in his eyes on his gait, to suggest an ideal. The soul side of him did not emerge from its material wrappings.

He told me he was a Nepalese Sannyasi and he showed me his signs, pleased as a campaigner with his medals. On his right arm he, wore a brass bangle with tiger heads meeting, the badge of Jawala Mukhi in the Kangra hills. On his *rudraksha*, the necklace of beads which every Shivaite wears, hung the brass image of Pasupatinath token of his pilgrimage to the shrine in Nepal. And he wore the iron ring of Kedarnath and the copper bangle of Badrinath, who dwell in the snows beyond Dehra Dun. I asked him if he had made the pilgrimage to the shrine of Krishna at Dwarka on the Bombay coast and he pointed to undecipherable symbols branded on each arm like very faint inoculation marks which had almost disappeared. He had made Ramesvaram, he told me, though he did not wear the conch shell on his wrist and many other pilgrimages to holy places which yield no badge, as Jagganath Puri and the priestless cave of Amarnath in the ice-world he had just visited.

I looked in vain for the necklace of "golden flies," emblem of the shrine of Kali at Hingalaj in Baluchistan, but no pilgrim wore it.

I put a rupee into the Sannyasi's hand, but his palm did not close on it; it lay there like a leaf that had fallen by chance. His mind was setting slowly two ways. It was an obscure piece of casuistry which troubled him and I helped him out by turning round and wishing him God-speed. He looked hungry and it meant a square meal to him every day for a week. But he made me feel that it was not etiquette to tip a holy man.

The Sadhu is seldom an ascetic by choice. Huge cauldrons of rice were being prepared for the different groups and they had drawn circles round their kitchens to keep off any whose profane shadow was pollution. But defilement menaced them in the shape of Phillips, who had come across the stream from his tent and nearly blundered into the sacred ring. I heard angry cries and protests from the kitchen and saw the subaltern doing the most extraordinarily solemn *pas seul*, one toe on the ground and the other held up aloft poised at each step, while he looked over his shoulder with a parody of deference to inquire exactly where he might put it down. It was a graceful retreat, a very original slow-step and high art at the same time, for the movement symbolised his own view of the position so well that the holy men were grinning all round at the good-natured irony of it and even those who so narrowly escaped being defiled looked sheepish and ready to smile. I had forgotten that the Sadhu had a sense of humour.

IV

The real hardships begin for the pilgrims after Tanin. The two thousand feet zigzag up to Zogpal, a ladder of penitence, has tried many pious hearts since the Sadhus first passed this way. At Zogpal they leave the tree-limit behind; every camp after that is a battlefield with its unrecorded roll of dead. Shiv's votaries are not provident: they carry little food and clothing and no fuel. They are grilled by the sun all day and at night the wind off the glaciers in the side valleys chills them to the bone. Many of them are weaklings, who have never seen a mountain before or ice or snow; but, sick or sound, it is the law that every pilgrim must immerse himself daily in some icy stream or tarn. Some carry the *kangar* of Kashmir, a small wicker-covered earthen pot of burning charcoal. They place it between their legs and sit up over it all night, wrapping their blankets round them to keep in the fumes.

The first camp beyond Tanin is at Shisha Nag, 12,000 feet, the loveliest lake in the hills.

The next day they cross a pass of 14,000 feet, with glaciers to the east of them and the Koh-i-noor peaks to the south and camp at Pangitarni, in an unexpectedly broad valley at the foot of a glacier, the main source of the Sind. Here they must bathe in all the five confluent streams. They make the pilgrimage to Amarnath and back the same day. The savage wildness of the last march, the twisted pinnacles, the strange scorings of the crag, must appeal to the Hindu's love of the marvellous and affect the least impressionable. It may be the pilgrims think it is only here on the threshold of the god that nature assumes these horrid shapes.

The road is a rough ordeal for women and old folk. Pneumonia takes its toll; mountain sickness frightens some to the brink of the grave; the cholera goddess makes fearful havoc when she strikes and it is strange that any survive immersion in the icy glacier streams. But now the Kashmir State has recognised its obligations, few die of actual cold or hunger or exhaustion. How the Sadhus disposed of their dead in this treeless waste before the Durbar took care of them, Heaven and the vultures only know. The lammergeiers we saw were drunk with meat and could not fly or hop from one rock to another and were palpably afraid of being overtaken by us on foot. But now beasts are sacrificed for man and the skeletons of transport ponies litter the way.

Many times and for many reasons we congratulated ourselves that we were not marching with the pilgrims, but we gained in one way we had not counted on by coming after them. At Shisha Nag and Pangitarni we found scores of Sadhus' wooden stools and camp-beds left behind by the State officials as not worth the transport. These we piled high and made a blaze beyond the wood limit which outshone our log-fires in the valley.

We took the short cut to Amarnath from Pangitarni, sheer ascent and descent. From the snow cornice on the summit we looked down into the cavern in the wall of rock opposite, so bleak and ominous and remote from the warmth of human fellowship, we wondered the first pilgrim dared enter it.

As we descended we saw a thin grey wreath of smoke curling up by the mouth of the cave. We had been told that no one approached Amarnath except in the pilgrimage and thought it must be some hermit dwelling there alone, communing with the Infinite. We could just distinguish two diminutive figures bending over the fire far away. They looked so weak and helpless in all this vast desolation, they reminded me of a tiny brown naked child I had seen in Rajputana sprawling alone on a great rock.

It took half an hour's more scramble over rough crags and down the snow bridge in the gully before, we were within hail of them. The man, lithe and straight, in the prime of life, came forward to meet us. We could tell at a glance that he had been a soldier by the easy, confident way he approached, naked as he was but for a loin-cloth, conscious of a bond with the Sahib, the only bond of strength and endurance that links East and West.

I caught a distant glimpse of the woman just at the moment she thought it decent to throw a blanket about her face and shoulders. Her skin was fair.

The man was a Brahmin. He had been a pay havildar in the 26TH Bombay Infantry. He had served in Burma and China and Waziristan. He and his wife had come with the pilgrims; they and one other alone of the seven thousand had remained behind. He told me quite simply that he was hoping for a son. And he was searching for the truth. He had sought it in many places and not found it, but here at Amarnath he believed he would find it. And it seemed to me as I stood under the roof of this Himalayan cathedral very natural that he should. If the problem of existence is to be worked out alone, if nature yields up her secrets anywhere to searching or to faith, it might well be to such a man in such a place.

"Sahib," he said," I knew two Englishmen would come here today."

We asked him how.

He pointed vaguely at the glacier up the valley. "Nature told me," he said. "Sahib," he went on, "I have been here five days. I brought no food, yet God has provided for me day by day. I think I shall find truth here."

We offered him rice, but he would take nothing.

"I eat only what God sends," he, said. "There are plenty of leeks by the cave."

He was modestly proud of his spare diet and his prophetic lore. He pointed to the rocks below and we saw the mauve heads of wild onions growing among the rhubarb leaves. We had seen neither plant until then in all our twenty-three marches from the plains.

"I have slept in the cave five nights," he said. "They told me that no man could do this."

We, too, had heard that it was a priestless shrine and that no pilgrim dwelt there. A Maharaja of the royal house had tried to sleep there once, but Shiv had cast him out. He was lifted up by some mysterious subterranean wind and left senseless on the ground before the rock pillars of the cavern.

The Brahmin spoke of God's favour like a man who has just discovered a new; way of life and wishes to impart it, something he had suspected but never quite realised before. There was no hint of boasting or desire to impress.

And then he talked of his army days. He had brought home loot from China and given it all to God. It reminded me of the golden age of Hindustan, when a man was all things in his life, but each thing separately and at the right time. First, the student; then the husband, householder, parent, wage-earner; then the Sannyasi searching for truth in the forest, with or without his wife; lastly, the ascetic or recluse dwelling solely in the world to come.

V

Later, when we entered the cave, the Brahmin was sitting by the ice wrapped in contemplation. At intervals he muttered prayers and scattered flowers on the lingam, handfuls of blue geraniums and buttercups and primulas and potentillas and the mauve wild onion. Then he would sit motionless, still as the stalactite, until he broke out in a loud, rich chant which reverberated through the cave. He was singing the Shiv Purana.

It seemed to me at the time quite natural that he should worship the ice-lingam. For the mountain was the end of everything. There was no path beyond it save for spirits and the birds of the air and the cave entered deep into its womb. The green monster, the size and figure of a congealed god, was the miraculous culmination of the natural world.

I thought of the first wandering ascetic who penetrated this wilderness to commune with the Eternal. The queer natural lingams on the ridge pointing the way would strengthen any wavering belief in Siva's godhead—little squat turrets eaten away from the rock by the snow and ice, standing one behind the other half-way down the hill like sculptured gnomes or djinns petrified in their gambols by Shiv's resentful hand when they ventured too profanely near his cave.

Then he would stand on Bairagi ghat and look down on the huge black fissure in the side of the mountain. There is nothing like it in all the hills.

From the frozen torrent two hundred feet beneath he would peer up into the vast arch, no mere aperture scooped out of the rock, but a sweeping curve of the mountain, a flying buttress of the cliff, giving the place more the air of a mansion, the rough-hewn dwelling-place of a god, than a hollow cavern. Fearfully he would pass the great cyclopean column on the left. His very shortness of breath would be an attribute of the god. The ray, chill air would oppress his spirit; at first the emptiness and his suspense would appal him more than a direct manifestation. Then, as he approached in trembling expectation, he would come upon the lurking god, the eternal energy, imprisoned in the smooth, green, unnatural-looking ice, which reflects the white stains and flaws of the roof and stretches two tentacles into the interstices of the rock, each a perfect lingam.

The rumour of Amarnath would spread quickly. There would be heart-stirrings in the temple of Siva at Benares. Down at Madura they would be hearing that a holy man had found Shiv's dwelling-place tunnelled into the last fortress of the hills and that he had knelt beside his lingam where the god lay transparent and seen the dim movings of the Eternal Spirit within. In a few months the first awed pilgrimage would start, leaving their dead by the road, perished of hunger and cold and disease and exhaustion, but eternally saved. No physical ill will ever extinguish that flame.

But you do not perceive the true sublimity of Siva's mansion until you turn your back on the god and look across the valley. The arch exactly frames the limestone cliff opposite where the crags bisect the blue. It is his southern rampart, a bow-shot from the shrine. For there is no bed to the valley here. The mountains drop straight down on either side into the stream.

The only other soul in Amarnath was a naked Yogi and the sight of him in that raw air made me cold. We did not speak to him, for the man was not the kind who speaks or answers questions. He did not pray visibly or chant or sing, but he held his knees in his hands and bowed and swayed and writhed to some regular rhythm. Sometimes he stopped and stirred his dead ash-fire with a stick. He looked at us with hate. He was repulsive and unclean. I think he was practising some severe kind of *yoga* without success, seeking to attach his spiritual part to the resisting Essence—seeking, in fine, to get out of himself, which seemed the most natural wish in the world.

The Brahmin was still praying when we left the cave. We passed by the woman in the same place, a poor huddled thing, her head drooping under the blanket. We wondered if she believed. She was still there when we returned in the evening, after exploring a way out of the valley. We heard the Brahmin's chant again as we climbed the path. He was rising when we entered and asked if he could do us any service—fetch water or juniper scrub. He wanted us to take his puttoo blanket. Instead, we asked him to show us how the pilgrims came to the cave.

He pointed out the place where the Mahunt sits above the Essence with a massive chest for the offerings. The pilgrims pass in a continual procession before the lingam, scatter their offerings on the ice, make their obeisance and retire. None may sleep in the cave or enter it before the Mahunt and none linger after midday. The offerings are received by the

State officials and distributed in three parts: to the Mahunt of Bhairon Asthan, who carries the mace; to the priests of Bawan; and the landlords of Batkot, the little walnut-shaded village below Pahalgam.

The arrival of the pilgrims must have been an impressive sight; but I would rather see the cave as we did. I had watched the Sadhus pass twice on the road and could imagine the drilled pageant of professionals with all their mummery and abracadabra. I felt that the cave gained from isolation. Every pilgrim ought to visit it alone. It was these two solitary human figures, whose faith was the greatest, who brought home to me more than any prescribed rites and ceremonies could the true significance of Siva's worship, the intense awe and devotion which his natural altars inspire.

As darkness was gathering the Brahmin told us the legends of Amamath. When Siva made the cave he created at the same time the two pigeons that haunt it. They never change or die or multiply. The Sadhus call them Siva and Parvati and when they fly out as the pilgrims enter, salaam with folded hands and consider it an auspicious greeting. He pointed to the squat crags on the cliff opposite, like petrified djinns. They were Siva's outposts—the *kotwals*[2] of the valley, as he called them—and they saw that nothing evil approached the cave.

He took us to a small slab of ice in the corner of the cave, another frozen gypsum spring with flowers thrown on it. It was Ganesh, Siva's son, sadly dwindled. One more hot, dry season and Ganesh will disappear and some priest will translate the mystery to his credit and advantage. Siva's own essence had dwindled, the Brahmin told us, since he had been in the cave. And that legend will die hard. For no one is likely to be long at Amarnath, unless it be the devout few, who stay behind unsatisfied after the pilgrimage of Sawan. The ice would be dwindling then and if they stayed for the turn of the year they would see it wax again with the September moon.

But these cold mysteries could hold us no longer. We saw our cook lighting the big fire in the camp underneath, signal for soup and stew and turning in. We must leave the Eternal Divine Essence to its votaries.

"Will he take money?" Phillips whispered to me.

"Do you think he meant that when he talked about Khûd providing?"

"Let's try."

We placed two pieces of silver on the stone by his book. The Brahmin heard the chink and looked up.

"No, no," he cried.

Phillips expostulated.

"It is the custom of the sahibs when they visit shrines to make offerings to holy men."

But he would have none of it and there was no pride in his refusal. He was afraid of possessions, he told us. He had had sufficient wealth, but he had given his land to Shiv and the loot he had brought home with him from China. Where was the merit if he took alms? God would see that he wanted nothing.

We understood. Our rupees would spoil everything. Phillips picked them up again uncomfortably. It was a difficult thing to do and I was thankful to him for it. But what the poor huddled woman thought of it, I wondered. Did she share her husband's faith? She sat brooding in her blanket like dejection personified, cold and hungry and tired and miserable, it seemed to me. Every now and then a feeble cough shook her, otherwise she made no movement or sound.

We went down and warmed ourselves by the cheerful blaze and smoked our pipes thankfully. The fire was too good to leave. It was a beautiful, frosty, starlight night. At intervals the pilgrim's rich chant descended to us from the cave. Then there was silence. Then the solemn, droned litany, the sound you hear in churches, temples, mosques, wherever men worship, of whatever creed. Then the woman's hacking cough. And the cavernous gloom above us was dimly lighted as the man threw a few juniper sprigs on the fire, which flickered for a moment and went out.

The cave threw out sound like a megaphone. "Grand place for a concert," Phillips said.

"High, concave roof, same principle as the Albert Hall." And he rose slowly and went into his tent. He came back with his banjo and played it softly over the fire.

Ting-a-ling-a-ling, ting-a-ling-a-ling went up to the stars. And the resonant chant issued from the cave.

"Two indomitable spirits," I thought as I turned in. And whenever I woke up in the night I wondered if the woman believed.

END NOTES:

1. Naked.
2. Gallice, Gendarmes.

2

TO AMARNATH AND GANGABAL

GANGABAL

The path from Amarnath to Baltal in the Sind valley by which we were to reach Gangabal, six marches distant, was blocked. The snow bridges were broken, as we had expected. But to turn back was unthinkable. There was nothing for it but to climb the ridge behind the cave and drop down into Ladakh and thence over the Zoji-la into Kashmir again. It was a simple pass about 14,500 feet, which, as we knew, had been traversed before. It offered no difficulties, but the Kashmir coolie is a timid creature and it is never easy to lead him off the track, much less over untrodden snow. We had meant to return to our camp at Panjitarni from Amarnath, but early in the morning we sent our servants back to bring our tents on to the cave. The coolies had been fractious; they had got, wind of our move and attacked Phillips' shikari. So when we returned to Amarnath in the evening we were relieved to see the white canvas pitched beneath us on the uneven ground at the mouth of the cave.

We expected trouble in the morning, but we were not prepared for what happened. When the coolies discovered that we were set on crossing the pass, they all sat down in a ring and cried. Real sobs shook these robust men; they were able to conjure up real tears, which fell upon their beards and manly bosoms—twenty-four strong men in a ring, each sitting on a stone and sniffling and whimpering, "I will not go."

It was the first time we had seen men of sinew; weep. We laughed and then we felt ashamed; there was vicarious humiliation in the sight. If a Martian had come upon us then, he would have put us all down in the same genus, perhaps the same species, Man.

However, they went on with a little encouragement and a little prodding, delicate but firm, to stiffen it. Phillips led the first man by the hand and I followed the last with my khud-stick laid gently against the small of his back. In a few hours they were laughing as they watched us glissade down. In the evening they went off pleased with their baksheesh and shouting and singing and thinking themselves great bahadurs.

The pass took us into Ladakh and we struck the famous Leh road a few miles below; the Zoji-la. I had never seen Ladakh or the road before, but I knew them both. I knew the road, because every book of Central Asian travel describes it and the author's rapture when he descends into the flowery *margs* of Kashmir. And I knew the country, because the scenery is that of the dry land beyond the water-shed, where the rainfall is less than six inches in the year. You cross into it over all the passes to the north. One day Nature is gloriously attired; the next she is stripped bare. Or it may be a matter of a few hours. You zigzag up through the forest to the juniper scrub and dwarf rhododendrons. A few straggling birches lead a forlorn hope behind you, beyond the tree-line; the flowers carpet the earth as thickly, but they become smaller and brighter. The only sounds of life that break the stillness are the warning pipe of the marmot and the shrill resentful cry of the raven and the chough. You pass a little ice and the tail of a moraine. Shelves of snow scored by falling rock slope down to the path. Then after many false summits you reach a gap in the rock and look down on the bare ribs of the earth over a sheet of snow and green and grey glacier.

Descend to ten or eleven thousand feet and you are in a treeless world, in the reek of hot fennel and wormwood. The lower slopes of the hills are flecked with green and yellow where the fennel is sheltered or parched by the sun. The sky is an intense blue; the heat and glare are fierce; a gale is tearing down the valley; the roar of the torrent is always in your ears. Side valleys reveal hidden glacier worlds. The path is overhung with coloured crags, grouped always in some new, wild, haphazard, architectural design, grand in its scorn of symmetry; walls of cliff scored and charactered all over, twisted turrets, splintered buttresses running down into the smooth mammae of the grazing slopes. And this rocky wilderness repeats itself, I believe, with infinite variety in monotony, to the great plateaus and the ranges beyond, yielding nothing to Pan save patches of willows and poplars and walnuts, the haunts of magpies and hoopooes, bordering fields of stunted barley.

There are oases of kinds, but no real forest again, save perhaps the Siberian pines, between Panji or Gautsa or Baltal and the Arctic sea.

I had no wish to go far along the road and turn back. I felt that if I made seven marches down the valley I must go right through to Kashgar and Yarkand, under the hanging snows of Karakoram, until I heard the clank of chains and couplings on the Russian line.

The pastoral bias would not allow us farther than Dras. Four days was enough to burn the valley into my mind and the pleasure of these inarches was more of the kind one gets from revisiting old haunts than from exploring an unfamiliar country.

I lit my pipe in the shelter of a dak-runner's hut. There was a yak-dung fire in the corner and the fumes mixed with the tobacco smoke translated me physically to Tibet, as only smells can. Shut eyes and the blend of Craven and *argol*[1] will be a recipe for that land with many. They act like the magic carpet of Prince Hussain.

Then I sat in the one clump of willows, less than thirty stunted trees, between the Zoji-la and Dras and watched the people go by. A Ladakhi came along the road and his walk called up a hundred buried memories. How many people had I seen coming towards me like that?–Arabs and Tibetans, generally with the heat-haze dancing over them. I may have associated the gait subconsciously with the landscape without giving it any particular thought, but it only then struck me how differently people walk in hot, dry, desert countries, especially in these barren plateaus ringed in with mountains. And not men only, but yaks and horses, donkeys and sheep.

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A Yarkandi caravan followed: it was an hour coming and passing out of sight and I noticed the same slow, picturesque, limpid gait, like ants in procession, as they passed in the thin hot air between the mountains which preclude any vagary from the path.

There was an intentness and sureness about every human figure which gave them a kind of dignity even in a shamble. The yaks on a distant hillside changing their pasture had the same air. There is no chance or alternative in these bleak lands. No one starts for one place and goes to another. No one drifts or is detached from his purpose. No one hurries or has to be in time. No one "goes for a walk." Places are too far off, the standard of time is too vague for men to stride or run. That caravan may have been fifty days on the road from Yarkand. Ten days more or less is of small account. There is certainty only in fulfillment.

I often think it is the great distance of places from one another in bleak countries as much as the climate that gives the Asiatic his air of fatalism and repose. You see it more in the north of India and beyond the Himalayas than in the teeming cities of Madras and Bengal, where people live under a strain and life has become as complex and faces as anxious and self-conscious as in the West.

At Dras we looked in at the serai. There were thirty Yarkandi pilgrims there bound for Mecca by the Punjab and Bombay—tall, robust men in *chogas* of white or butcher-blue, wearing furrimmed caps, peaceful, puckered, weather-beaten faces, prominent cheek-bones, Gallic beards, complexion a brick-dust colour. The women were cooking in a corner of the yard and hid their red faces. There was something bracing about these men after Amarnath; the West has more in common with the Haji than with the Sadhu. Theirs is an ampler pilgrimage, a wider horizon, a more direct, imperious call, breathing through the salt, the mountain and the desert air. There is nothing dark or secret or mysterious in it. It is a clarion note calling to open spaces, earth the floor and heaven the roof, as free of lurking mystery as the mosque of dark images, oblique symbols, ambiguous interpretations.

We turned back from Dras over the Zoji-la. It is the deepest depression in the main barrier of the Himalayas for hundreds of miles along the frontier and it is not like anything one generally associates with a pass. You might cross it without noticing it. The water, trickling from a fissure in the rock, takes two courses; above and below, the snow bridges have a scarcely perceptible incline. But the drop from the bleak land has been the theme of many rhapsodies. We, too, had had our surfeit of barrenness; we were all for pastoral Kashmir. We wanted to camp in a mountain garden again and dine under the stars by a blaze as big as a king's pyre.

We went down the Sind valley and turned up the Kanknai under Haramokh and in five days we were camping by the grey, old, lichened, lizard-haunted ruins of Wangat, which stand in groves beside the maize and the waving fields of balsam and the yellowing elder—shrines dedicated to some old forgotten god. An owl tu-whooted to us from the trefoiled arch as we drank our soup. After dinner we went inside and lighted a small fire on the stones. The sweet scent of burning pine-wood mingled with the musty old smell of tombs and Phillips made rabbits and tigers and devils and elephants and swans with the shadow of his hands. I wondered if, in all its two thousand years, anyone else had played with shadows on the wall.

It is a stiff hot climb up to Gangabal. There is no ascent so hot or long or steep on the road to Amarnath, but the pilgrims' sufferings are over in a day. You pass from walnut to birch and juniper and beyond the tree-line in a few hours and you are zigzagging up among the low long-needled pines without a break for four thousand feet.

I have always had a dislike for these trees and never asked myself or understood why until I stood on the burnt slope of Haramokh and looked at the serried mast forest across the valley. They are a low pedestrian growth. They hang about cantonments and drop their cones on galvanised iron roofs. Shrieking engines belch their smoke into them; vulgar people picnic under them. They exhale the spirit of the foothills. A niggard, un-aspiring crew, pines in name only, the letter without the spirit. You may wander among them all day and never be out of sight of ugly useful things.

Everyone loves the dear, old, homely wayside trees, the willow and elm and poplar and walnut that know the same gods as the hearth and the byre and the thatched barn; but in the mountains give me those brave firs, picea and abies, the purple squadron striding the blast, the serried mast forest breasting the precipice, the bravest flung forward in the teeth of the glacier, with the dead white-lopped trunks of the fallen all round them.

Higher still, in the sheltered clefts of the mountain, are the silver birches, most spiritual of trees, who love the rare air and breathe the communal mystery of the hills. When the breeze plays in their leaves they betray the spirit of the grove, like the shadow of an emotion passing over a young girl's face.

It is easy to believe that the genii of a place dwell in the trees. They even more than the flowers express the mood and spirit of the earth. The Bassahris in the Sutlej valley believe that every tree has its little Deva and whenever they fell one they place a stone on the lopped trunk to keep the genius within. The Druids knew it, who worshipped the oak and the Greeks, who had faith to see the Dryads; the Burmans know it, who offers grain to the djinns who dwell in trees of greatest girth; and every lover of the woods knows it by instinct from a child.

It was inspiriting to be up among the silver birches again. It is a wild country at the back of Haramokh, so sheltered that the birches' hang over the eastern cliff of the lake at an elevation of 12,500 feet. We crossed a narrow ridge and came suddenly upon the lake. The scene is, though in a different way, as impressive as Amarnath. It is not so wild and remote; it does not give one the sense of coming to an end of the created world; but it is far more beautiful. The north-eastern buttress of Haramokh which overhangs it is one of the grandest rock-faces in Kashmir. The grey shelves of glacier meet in a lap of ice which falls sheer into the green waters of the lake. A flowery *marg* carpeted with the bright pink lousewort with the white eye separates the first lake from a large crescent-shaped sheet of water. It is here, where clouds gather and pass among the dripping precipices, where the eagle screams and the thunder of the avalanche is heard all day, that the Kashmiri comes to bury the knuckle-bones of his dead, left over from the funeral pyre.

We approached Gangabal by a detour through a chaotic tumbled mass of rock hurled by some titanic upheaval across the pasture. In places the boulders stood over our heads and we took nearly an hour crossing. In one narrow stretch where cattle had crossed we came upon blood sprinkled on the rock as if with intention and it occurred to me that it might have been shed there in propitiation to the djinns of the place by some superstitious herdsman, as who should say, "Here's your blood. Take it. But let my cattle pass."

The rattle of the hidden stream underneath increased the mysterious gloom of the basin. Phillips and I both felt giddy and sick, though we had not been affected at 15,000 feet, which made us think at the time that mountain lassitude is a local ailment due, as the natives believe, to the malignant influence of certain places.

Again we had just missed the hour of pilgrimage. On the way down below Wangat I met an old man holding a wand in front of him, with a small green bag tied to the end like a child's purse and one bright marigold stuck in the loop. It held his son's knuckle-bones. We met whole families after that, with the remains of every kind of relative and priests innumerable, who would exact the last pie for the Shradh ceremony, the shriving of the soul and the mass for the dead, which is held at the meeting of the streams between the two lakes.

It is odd that the Kashmiri Pundit, to whom the Hindu of the plains will admit no shred of virtue or self-respect, much less any delicacy of spirit, has conceived and practises the most poetical burial-rites the world knows. His pilgrimage, however, saves him a larger journey. The Hindu of the plains throws the knuckle-bones of his dead into the Ganges. The Hindu of Kashmir, believing that Gangabal is the source of the Ganga— from which convenient error it derives its name— makes this arduous ascent in the hottest month of the year and casts the relics of his dead into the lake.

> "Here—here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form, lightning's
> are loosened."

The still lake of Gangabal, which sleeps in the bosom of Haramokh, may well symbolise the eternal peace. There is nothing here to detach the mind from the everlasting. Here, if anywhere, the soul of man may be made one with Nature. So the Kashmiri asks that, when his unhappy spirit is dismissed to wander through its endless cycle of rebirths, the one enduring part of him which has survived the flames may be lapped in the green waves beneath the glacier, rolled in the oozy granite bed and become an indestructible part of the material world, laid upon the supreme altar, in the deep lake, among the foundations of the hills.

END NOTES:

1. Yak-dung fuel.

3

ROUND NANGA PARBAT

I

The Hindu does not climb the mountains where his gods live; he goes round them as he would any other shrine. There is great virtue in this. The most devout measure the length of the path with the length of their limbs. They lie prone and draw themselves up, the heel touching the spot where the forehead last rested. This is the *Ashtanga Danddwat*, the pilgrimage of progression by pressing the eight parts of the body to the ground. I have seen yogis make the circuit of Benares wriggling like the green looper caterpillar in the dust. And I have seen Buddhists, mostly maimed or blind, crawling in the mire of the *Lingkor* that rings the Potala at Lhasa, the holy rock on which the incarnation of *Avalokiteswara* is throned. Buddhists and Hindus alike circumambulate Kang Rinpoche, the chorten-like Kailas in Tibet by the sacred Mansarowar Lake. I have seen a shock-headed Bairagi drifting round the lesser Kailas in Bussahr, mumbling and inarticulate. It did not enter my head that someday I, too, should feel the same compulsion and that I should be drawn round the divine Nanga Parbat like a bit of detached weed in a current.

When I knew that I must go round, it was natural that I should become interested in the psychology of an instinct which I shared with such inscrutable neighbours and I asked a Sanskrit Pundit if he could find anything in his Scriptures to explain the springs of the motive. He brought me texts in plenty, but I should have known how fruitless these inquiries are. Words, more especially translated words, are too arbitrary to convey the spirit. In the Yaju Veda (xxvi 15) it is written—I quote the learned Pundit's rendering: "Intellect of man is sharpened by going round mountains." In the Ngaya (Philosophy of Gautama), IV 42: "Meditation in cavities of mountains adds to a man's spiritual knowledge." In the Kedarkalpa, I 1: "A visit to Kailas contributes to intellectual happiness at all times. There is no doubt of it." And again, in the Mahabharata, XXXIV 2: "Oh, King, those who visit Kailas become of godly temperament." In the Panchtantra Mitrabhada, IX: "A man cannot attain knowledge, wealth and technical education unless he has been to mountains."

It would seem that the Hindu is more practical than we. He does nothing for nothing. When he exerts himself some sort of profit, spiritual or material, must come of it. Now, I had no object in going round Nanga Parbat. I was drawn by a sort of undefined attraction, an irresponsible curiosity. And there was something of the hair-shirt instinct in it. You will not provoke a like confession from Buddhist or Hindu, whether in speech or written word. Yet I never see an Asiatic pilgrim without wondering if he may not be afoot just for the pilgrimage.

The Anglo-Indian, too, saving a few wanderers like myself, is practical, like the Hindu. With him exercise of any kind must contribute to some traditional sport in which achievement is an asset. None of the orthodox could understand why I wished to walk round Nanga Parbat.

''Going to shoot? There ought to be a markhor in those nullahs at the back."

"No."

"Fish?"

"No."

"I see; just going round. Foot-slogging in fact!"

My good-natured friend did not see. But he wished to cover the nakedness of my projects as decently as he could.

"Going to climb it?" he asked hopefully.

Further humiliation. I had to confess that I had designs on the girth and not the summit. I was going to circumambulate the blessed peak like any ordinary Hindu.

My friend looked at me with sorrow. Climbing mountains, though an odd freak, is nevertheless a recognised pastime. There is a volume in the Badminton on it, like polo or cricket or golf. But going round!

"When do you start?"

"The next Friday that ever is."

"Well, I hope you'll enjoy it."

He spoke doubtfully. Here a disagreeable man, who had been listening, broke in:

"Thank God I don't spend my leave shinning up rocks!"

Then fat good-natured Yorke put in a word for me from the depths of his arm-chair. He was on leave from Gilgit and nothing less than a 44-inch ibex would have induced him to climb a *khud*.

"You like the hills?" he asked in an understanding voice. The atmosphere softened at once; the disagreeable man was mildly rebuked. Nevertheless I knew there would come a time before I had made my ring round Nanga Parbat, when, tired of shale and glare and false summits, I should envy Yorke in his long chair with his long cold drink and newspaper, secure against every possible contretemps.

The wanderer needs no logical impulse to start him on his travels, but thinking of the scene afterwards and of others like it, it occurred to me that I might have partially re-established my sanity in the eyes of my friends. There are folks, who will put themselves to discomfort to see anything with a big label on it. I think the disagreeable man would have "passed" Everest as he might have passed Niagara or Yellowstone Park. It is true Nanga Parbat is not the highest mountain in the world—there are three or four peaks higher; but there is no rock-face anywhere comparable to the drop from the summit 26,620 feet on the north-west to the bed of the Indus nearly 24,000 feet beneath. Everest, Kanchenjunga, K2, all the giants of Nepal, Sikkim and Karakoram, rise from great mountain-chains or high tablelands; their highest pinnacles are invisible from below. Nanga Parbat, the incomparable, alone reveals her whole naked majesty and beauty, rising from the river-bed in Chilas at a little more than 3,000 feet above sea-level to as near heaven as may be. And she stands alone, a patent goddess, 9,000 feet higher than any other summit within 120 miles, save the subordinate peaks of the same massif.

Every mountaineer has his own idea as to what is the most impressive rock-face in the Alps. In picturing sheer declivity one thinks of the east wall of the Finsteraarhorn, the Mer de Glace face of the Charmoz and Grepon, the south wall of the Marmolota, one tremendous precipice or the south faces of the Ecrins and Mont Blanc. But to conjure up an image of Nanga Parbat from the north we must pile these on the top of one another like Pelion on Ossa. Take for the base the east face of Monte Rosa, where it rises 11,000 feet above Macugnaga. Pile on the Meije as seen from La Grave, 8,000 feet of precipice rising in tiers above the road. Top all with the tremendous north cliff of the Matterhorn and your idealised mountain may bear some resemblance to Nanga Parbat save for the savage wildness of the setting—sphere one looks down from the hills above Gor into the black trough of the Indus and then lifts one's eyes slowly up to the peak above.

The southern, face of the mountain seen from the Pir Panjal is approached by passes of from 13,000 to 14,000 feet, so that this view, the only one familiar to the folk who "go to the hills," is surpassed, in extent at least, by others in the Himalayas. The rare and exquisite beauty of it lies in the suggestion of something unearthly and remote. On clear mornings and at sunset after rain, she is seen across the valley of Kashmir a wraith-like vision hanging between earth and sky, her base hidden in clouds remote from the pedestrian ranges at her feet. She alone is of the Olympians; the peaks all around are of a different birth; the gross dromedary back of Haramokh to the east is of the earth beside her. When I had watched the rose, the opal, the amber lights of dawn dissolving in the mists that covered the intervening ranges and seen the head of Nanga floating in the air far away and ethereal, I was ill at ease until I had started on the road with my tent and baggage. I have never seen a peak that draws one so irresistibly towards it.

II

On Friday, the 1st of August, we started off. Longden came with me, no mountain-lover, but a philosopher curious of experience. We rode the first two stages to Sopore on the Wular Lake, where I had sent on my camp. Here we met Guffara, our headman and twenty permanent coolies of his choosing, picked men all and not too terrified of ice and snow. Many of them had already been through some of the stiffest country in the Himalayas with the Duke of the Abruzzi and other mountaineers. This was as well, for one meets coolies who sulk and sometimes bolt, if they are asked to leave the road. We had no mountaineering before us, but our walking tour would include some glaciers and rough scrambles. In case any of our men deserted, I had arranged for another batch to meet us at Niat across the frontier. But there, was no need; all our men came through with us. Guffara had them well in hand; where he went they would go and we had no trouble with them from start to finish. We took five ponies with us to carry rations for ten days and to ease the loads until the road became impracticable at Damel Nurinar, seven miles beyond Shardi, on the Kishengunga. As no supplies could be raised near our camps under Nanga Parbat, we had arranged for rations to be sent up the nullahs from the villages of Chilas, an unfertile country which barely supplies its own needs. It is for this reason chiefly that permits to shoot or climb in the district are limited to two or three travellers each year. Guffara was an acquisition. He is a mountaineer and has been trained by Bruce, with whom he has been climbing for the last fifteen years. And he knew the country. He had been on the ill-fated expedition to Nanga Parbat in 1895, with Mummery, Collie, Bruce and Hastings, in which Mummery and the two Gurkhas Ragobir and Goman Singh lost their lives. I do not think any mountaineer has attacked the peak since. Bruce sent Guffara to us and came down from Tragbal to Sopore to see us off and helped us in many ways. We rode the two next stages from Sopore, still in the hot valley, through grassy lanes, between avenues of poplar, willow and mulberry, fragrant with the sweet earthy smell of the rise. There, were little bubbling water-channels on either side, which meant a double border of flowers; by the edge of the road a line of homely English wayside herbs, agrimony, succory, vervain, mullein, bird's-foot trefoil; and on the banks of the streamlet familiar marsh-plants, water plantain, arrowhead, willow-herb, forget-me-not and loosestrife. But the most beautiful thing we saw was the starry chains of light blue succory spread over the maze of intersecting bunds between the rice-fields, like a web of stringed turquoises. Every now and then we came to villages embowered in groves of walnut and elm and chinar, apple-orchards and clumps of haw-thorn. Masses of briar in seed and faded irises spread over the humble graveyards told us that the valley must have been even more beautiful in spring. Then the road would lead up to a stony ghat and the lush water-flowers would give place to the dianthus, white and pink and the deep blue salvia.

When the marches were not too long we halted for two or three hours in the middle of the day. I packed "L'Immortel" and "Cosmopolis" in the tiffin basket for the first half of the journey. There is a double zest in a book with a scene remote from one's surroundings, especially when one's surroundings fit one's mood. At Bunji I read "Under the Greenwood Tree." Longden's yakdhan was heavy with literature. By different rills and streams he digested four volumes of Economic History.

When we left the shade of the grass lanes the heat was intense. The only relief was a subconscious one in the babble of the network of water-courses which spread everywhere, feeding the rice-fields and turning little mills like rabbit-hutches laid across the stream, from which some old Semitic crone or naked little wide-eyed girl would peep at us curiously and salaam. We reached the foot of the mountains at a village called Marhamma. The walnut trees here were the largest I have seen. The grass under them was starred with balsam and larkspur and a white umbelliferous plant like sheep's parsley. Looking up through the leaves we saw the blue hills we were circumventing and down the path the white and grey of the willows and poplars and the vivid green of the young seedling rice. We pitched our tents on a narrow plot between the graves of the village fathers and the house of an aged mullah who prayed and intoned all the while we were there, now playing the imam to a group of reverent elders, now the instructor of equally reverent, but more abstracted youth.

These pastoral scenes have an indescribable charm to one on the road to or from the snows. If one hears more of the beauty of Kashmir than of other parts of the Himalayas, it is because the pastoral bent is as strong in most wanderers as the love of wild scenery and no one can resist the blend of the two. The moods play upon one alternately—Pan's flute and the alpenhorn calling one up to the echoes of the moraine; the shade of a fruit-tree by a rippling stream and the cloud-shadows racing over a mountain-tarn where the tall gentian and primula peep out of their crevice in the rock.

The hackneyed Mughal simile of "the emerald set in pearls" is often quoted in descriptions of Kashmir. It might be applied to almost any valley in the Alps, but in the Himalayas, pasture, rock, forest, snow and still water are not combined so often in the same picture. Everything is on a larger scale. When the water is at your feet the snows are far away; when you are under the snows it is a far cry to forest and pasture. In Kashmir, a greater variety of scenery is contained in a small compass and that is where the charm of the country lies.

We had still six short stages to the frontier, but no two marches were alike. Our first small col, the Seetalwan Pass, took us into a typical valley of the foothills. The road kept falling down to the stream, crossing it and rising over the cliffs on either side and dipping into the bed again, blocked here and there by lumber of driftwood, through which the ponies were led with difficulty. The faint smell which the sun draws from the rotting pine debris, which litters the side nullahs and almost chokes the stream itself, mingles with the familiar artemisia scent and as we cross exposed sunny slopes, with the delicate almost imperceptible fragrance of the balsam. Impatiens, which always grows as thick as a sown crop in these valleys, varies in colour with sun and shade and soil, so that one sees it descending the ravines like a marshalled procession, group behind group, in uniforms of pink or white or yellow. Another cleft of the rock will be invaded by the giant Senecio, which sweeps down from some hidden upland to the stream in a rich golden flood. One wonders what battalions are coming on behind.

III

We dropped down the Jimigam nullah into the broad valley of the Kishengunga, which we followed to Shardi, where the Kamakdhori River comes in from the north. We followed this valley, an unfrequented route, to the pass by which we entered Baltistan. From Damel Nurinar, where we sent back our ponies, it is a long approach of two days to the col by an easy gradient, terrace after terrace of pasture and snow-bridged ravine. At last one conies upon a long, level, uncompromising wall, a thousand feet above the floor of the valley. North and north-west a buttress is lifted into a peak, which enfolds the green frozen lake from which the Kamakdhori rises. One attacks the wall where one will. There is no dip or gully in it. You can see the top from below and it looks as level as a piece of masonry. A physical barrier like this, so pronounced and arbitrary, heightens the sense of expectation one always feels when approaching a frontier. We had expected a change in the character of the country the other side of that wall and we were not disappointed. From the Kamakdhori you look down into Baltistan. The hills are red and golden in the evening light. You have left a garden for a rough-hewn Titans' quarry; colour of flowers for colour of stone. And leaving the snow behind, you are soon treading down an appropriate backyard vegetation—dock and polygonum, nettle and swart juniper and reeking southernwood and the little persicaria which you will welcome, especially if the floor of your tent pitched in the twilight turns out to be a dry matted bed of it so that the creamy pink spires greet you, when you wake, with the steam of your morning tea. Having breakfasted, you will spend hours descending stony cliffs and water-courses before you reach the wood-line and when at last you come upon the forest, you will see in it the very spirit of the soil, dark and stately deodars unrelieved by any softer green, springing from rock barren of moss or grass or flowers and giving the valley a sombre beauty of its own.

A wild country and a wilder people. For centuries the Chilasi raiders have terrorised the Kashmir peasants—now falling under our protection they have become the meek, the raided. The Kamakdhori valley is still invaded yearly, not by the Chilasis, but by their neighbours of Jalkot, the nearest of the Shinaki tribes to our borders. And so it will always be wherever we move our boundaries, the protected by a strange anomaly suffering at the hands of the unprotected. Had we come up the Kamakdhori valley a month later we might have met a horde of these raiders, a hundred to two hundred armed men carrying off their spoil–cattle and women and sheep and goats. The women are sometimes returned.

More prized is the *khat*, the real object of these expeditions, a root jealously preserved as a State monopoly in Kashmir. This the Jalkotis sell to the Chinese, who use it for incense and joss-sticks. The Kamakdhori villagers offer no resistance; they fear reprisals too much, nor dare they give information. The tribesmen have their own ideas of retributive justice. A *lambardar* once turned informer and in revenge for the betrayal they came across unexpectedly in the snow of late November and carried off sheep and goats and mares and foals. The villagers followed with lamentations right up to the Kamakdhori pass, where the tribesmen turned on them and beat them and stripped them naked in the snow, even as Hanun, King of Ammon, stripped the ambassadors of David naked to their buttocks and shaved off the one half of their beards. They fled wailing down the valley to the Political in Chilas.

The Political came to see us at Niat. We learnt from him that Government in its wisdom had found a way to stop these raids; already a fine had been levied on the tribesmen. It was a simple expedient. The Jalkoti cannot live without his salt; salt must come through Kashmir; if the Jalkoti does not stop his raids the Sircar will stop his salt. The expense of a punitive expedition is of course out of the question; though a youthful subaltern, more sporting than wise, returning from his shoot at the moment of a raid, only a day's march higher up the valley, thought it the chance of a lifetime for a scrap. He offered to lead a force against the Yagistanis if the *lambardar* would raise him fifty men and persuade the pensioners in the fort to join in. Happily for the subaltern the *lambardar* was not militant and the pensioners who lend money at usury were busy collecting their dues. "Young D...would have got no marks for that," the Political commented dryly when I told him the story.

We made our first halt at Niat, ten days out of Gulmarg. We had passed through some beautiful country and no two camps had been alike save that we were never far from the murmur of a stream. Wali Muhammad Khan, an orderly of the Chilas levy, joined us here and stayed with us till we reached the Gilgit road; it was his business to arrange supplies for the high camps. He had brought with him the ten extra coolies, but we only took two with us, as none of our men wished to turn back. We chose two powerful young Chilasis to lighten the loads. Ration coolies could be had in the villages farther on.

The "Mulki Sahib," as the Political is called, came with us to Khaya, smoothing the way and greatly augmenting our prestige. And he doubled the interest of the border, for he told us about the people. In the East the crossing of a frontier awakens one's curiosity more than in Europe and satisfies it less. The traveller has little chance of seeing more than the outside of things. He notices the new flora or the strata of the rock, the colour of the peasants' dresses, their houses and graves, the shape of their tools and utensils, the new rhythm of speech, the pitch of the voice, the depth from which the accents are thrown out. In Europe the change is more than physical. One enters an inn or one may make friends with the people and visit them in their houses. A hundred little subtle differences in eating, drinking, gestures, manners, aid in the new impression. Here the household life remains a mystery. Perhaps that is why externals strike one more. The Niat, Gasher, Khaya villages look like timber-yards, every house the same, fir-trunks lying one on the top of the other like stacked wood without cross-piece or stone and indistinguishable roofs. We saw no ornamentation anywhere until we came to a cemetery of holy men, each grave in a long wooden pound with the four corner-posts carved like pew-heads. Humbler folk lie under a heap of stones guarded by a dejected-looking wooden bird, a pair of markhor horns and a mast like the Buddhist praying-flag. The horns are auspicious–they help the dead on their lonely intricate path. Longden questioned the villagers and he quoted Hesiod and Prosper Merimee with reference to the symbolism of horns and crosses on graves. A suggestive talker, full of strange lore and more interested in men and books than in mountains.

We camped at Khaya, a Pathan settlement of gold-washers from the Indus. They leave the heat of the river for these summer quarters and farm a few terraced fields until the season comes round again when the valley is inhabitable. The Chilas fly comes up with them, a striped wasp-like insect whose bite leaves an itching blister. It is an ugly village, built on a bare ledge of the hill, without shade.

IV

It was from the Khaya pass above the village that we first saw Nanga Parbat as a reality and not a dream, a wraith no longer, but a very substantial part of this earth. I started before day-break and raced up to the top as hard as my lungs would let me, a three and a half hours climb. I arrived just as the sun stole over the ridge. There was no cloud on the Niat side, but I was prepared for a repulse or pretended to myself that I was, though inwardly I had great hope. And I had reason. The great hidden mountain was naked to the sun. The peak and her satellites filled the whole east. The ridges descending to the west and north which we were to cross in the next ten days lay almost bare of snow. I looked down into the Indus for the first time, surprised at the width of the valley. The rocks on my left cut off the view of the river abruptly, so I climbed the peak above the pass, another two hours' ascent, Gradually the course of the Indus unrolled itself to the east and north and whenever I looked behind me more of the western continuation of the Nanga Parbat chain, hidden before, had risen into view, the Diamirai and Mazeno peaks, the Mazeno, Thoso and Barei passes. But what I was most eager to see was the unknown country north and west of the river, the home of the wild Shinaki tribesmen, all the land between Jalkot and Swat. If no ridge intervened I should look down on this country from the peak for the first and probably the last time of my life. And there was still no cloud.

It was as I hoped. Chilas itself was hidden, but I could follow the course of the Indus through leagues of unexplored country to the west and beyond it the snow-peaks of Swat, a long straight barrier more than a hundred miles away. Nearer Chilas I could see where the Darel River comes in from the north, whither Stein had descended only three days before on his skin raft, in which he was sent down the stream by the Chilasis, rotating horridly but auspiciously by way of *salaamat* to the river. No living white man had entered the Darel before. All the Indus valley to the west and south-west of Chilas, a hundred and fifty miles front Thur to Amb, is unexplored. Range upon range lay before me like the undulations of the sea.

And to the north Haramosh and Rakiposhi, the mountains of Bunji and Gilgit and Hunza Nagar; and farther north still little cones and needles indistinguishable by the map, the sentinels of the great divide, outposts of the Karakoram, their crests just peeping above the barren slopes of the Hindu Raj, their northern flanks falling away into the territories of Russia. These mountains enfold the greatest ice-fields in the world out-side the Polar circles—the Baltoro, Siafen and Hispar glaciers. Many of them are unnamed, as they are too numerous to impress the imagination of the nomad herdsmen, though they may exceed the highest mountains in the Alps by more than ten thousand feet. Some have been given ugly British names, the sound of which is a profanation to those who love the mountains—like a barrel-organ heard through cathedral doors.

There were three summits, lately discovered, hidden somewhere beyond the farthest horizon. I had heard that a courageous American lady mountaineer, Mrs Bullock Workman, who had these peaks in her pocket, so to speak and thus claimed the right to stand gossip over them for all time, was not going to treat them over well. They were to bear the titles of kings and queens and viceroys. Where native imagination fails, it would be better to beat one's Balti coolie over the head until he thinks of a name.

One can forgive K2 and the like, the honest, workmanlike formulae of the surveyor, who must count the indentations of a range as the notches in a stick or teeth in a saw, but to drag in braced and booted man is the last offence. And the more he is gilded the greater the outrage; for herein lies distinction and the essence of mountain lore is that man is of ant-like proportions. The eternal hills are like the lark—

> "Seraphically free of taint of personality."

An emulous man on a mountain is a profanity. He should be there as a worshipper, impersonal, a pilgrim without a name, lost in the quest. A boast is unthinkable. One likes to dwell on these lonely, soaring peaks in their true human relations, as lying between distant habitable regions, viewed by the shepherd as the seat of his brooding divinity, beckoning to him or repelling him, filling his imagination as they glint in the moonlight through a chink of the rude stone hut which he has built round him like a cairn. Shepherds and goatherds should have the naming of the mountains or the nomads, the Kirghiz in his wicker-built *kibitka* with its felt roof or the Chang-pas who live in black tents and hunt the wild yak or the Tartars

> "who from Bokara come
> and Khiva and ferment the milk of mares."

The Asiatic has an instinct for sound in a name as unerring as Milton. A mere list of the summits which his fancy has invested would make an epic in itself—symbolical as a poem of Mallarmé; The names of some are so apt and representative that they might conjure up a true impression in the mind of a mountain-lover who had never seen them. Take the three main peaks that are seen from the vale of Kashmir: Nanga Parbat, lifted above the clouds, wraith-like, ethereal; the rugged Minotaur face of Haramokh; tapering Kolahoi. Or Masherbrum, whose name is like a pilgrim's gasp of wonder and cannot be uttered without awe. Or the giants of the Sikkim group—Kanchenjunga, Pandim, Kabru, Siniolchum—the first three massive, buttressed, foursquare under the tent of heaven; the last mystic, fay-like, of a rarer mould. And Chumulari, most divine of all, a present deity whose image sleeps in the turquoise water of the Bam-Tso—but for the grace of God she might be named Mount Younghusband or MacDonald or Curzon or Brodrick or King Edward VII.

V

From the col we descended to Bunar village and found our camp pitched in a willow grove on green turf beside a running stream—a happy oasis in this burnt, stony land. The main village is clustered round the top of a steep, fiat hill standing out in the centre of the valley; the brown houses, the same colour as the earth and rock, overhang the cliff; and on the south a watch-tower fort dominates the whole. We descended a deep gully under this stronghold, completely shaded by walnut-trees. The strong rich green of their leaves filled up the gap between the isolated hill and the nullah wall, in vivid contrast with the dun and brown all round.

The Diamirai nullah, which receives the greatest glacier of Nanga Parbat, debouches into the Bunar valley only two miles north-north-east of the village; but the peak is inaccessible this way and we had to ascend the valley some eight miles to Gashut and cross the Airen pass due east. Here again one stands above the nullah; but a further detour south is necessary, as the Lubar stream beneath the col is impassable. At Gashut we arranged supplies and coolies for Diamirai. One man carries a day's rations for the camp. These local coolies received eight annas for the day's march and every morning one was sent back.

It is a stiff climb up from Gashut out of the vines to the col, high above the wood limit. We camped that night two and a half hours short of the summit, at a parting of the ravines which the gujjars call Qhoqush, where there was barely ground to pitch a tent. We had hacked away a *gite* or two; our seven camp fires were already blazing; the moon had risen, silvering the barren cliffs opposite and beautifying everything, when a little old man rose from the abysmal chasm at our feet, who might have been the genius of that wild moonlit gully.

"Sahib," we heard, "Lor Khan has come."

The little, benign, gnome-like man stood in the firelight smiling. He had come to join us just as he had joined Mummery eighteen years ago.

"He came up from Gashut," Collie[1] wrote, "and insisted on stopping with us." He is drawn from his quiet valley into any adventure. Two years ago he had joined a Sikh surveyor on the Mazeno, where he fell and broke his leg. And here he was with a clucking hen under his arm by way of offering, a quiet, gentle little man, short and squat and square, with a large goitre and a face like a soapstone idol and eyes always rapt in a dream. A palpable Mongol, most reposeful he looked among our furtive-glancing coolies.

I had thought of Lor Khan as a stripling of somewhat heroic mould, having read how he had bridged the Lubar stream, stemming the torrent almost unaided when others failed and how he had climbed with Mummery and Collie in the most difficult places and showed no fear from the start, though the Chilasi, like other Himalayan tribesmen, excellent as he is on naked rock, approaches ice as a rule with undisguised terror. Indeed he is not shod' for it. It was on the Diamirai Peak, during the most sensational traverse Collie had ever made, that Lor Khan slipped out of one of the steps, a drop of four or five feet and hung with his face to the glistening ice, "whilst under him the thin coating of snow peeled off the face of the slope in great and ever-widening masses, gathering in volume as it plunged headlong down the mountain-side, finally to disappear over the cliffs thousands of feet below." It was a perilous moment for the others, but Lor Khan never lost his head or his axe. I saw him slip afterwards on pine needles and on snow, but he falls as if he had a gyroscope inside him, like one of those little weighted Bridge totems to whom balance is a natural law. And he is very like those kindly little demons in face and figure.

The next morning he was waiting by the fire in his grey woollen cap with upturned brim and coat to match, tucked in at the waist, whence it fell loosely over a pair of divided skirts of the same stuff. He wore putties and loose strips of sheep-skin, tied anyhow round his feet. It was in this gear that he had tempted the ice-slopes of Diamirai and Nanga Parbat. Lor Khan took the lead naturally; it never entered our heads to question his presence or his guidance. On each point he was sure and emphatic and he saved us many miles of rough going. He moved with the slow easy steps of the veteran, halting every now and then like a guide in the best chamois country, Claudio Perotti of Crissolo or his brother, to search the cliffs as we rounded each new shoulder. We were in the heart and centre of the markhor country. A herd was sighted, tracks were seen everywhere and we came upon a small cave where one had sheltered in the night.

From the col we had the same view of the mountain as from the Khaya pass, only we were two days nearer and no ridge intervened. Again there was no cloud, the massif filled the whole east. The mountains to the north and west were hidden by the jagged Gonar ridge, which falls from the Diama Pass into the Indus: and the Mazeno continuation to the south hid all the peaks on that side. But it was to the Diamirai glacier that we looked most eagerly.

At Niat and Bunar we had heard a rumour that the ice had broken away from the mountain and come down the valley like an avalanche in the spring of 1912. The rumbling had been heard at Chilas. Reports were vague. Lor Khan said that it had advanced four miles, the lumbardar six; but none of these folk recognise any measure of distance beyond the whole or a fraction of a day's march. Guffara, who believed the villagers, was full of forebodings. Longden and I were curious. We waited for Guffara, who was bringing up the lagging coolies. When he looked down from the pass into the valley his astonishment was visible. The whole face of the country had changed, he told us, since he was there with Mummery Sahib eighteen years ago. And he pointed to the sea of dirty ice falling away, as it seemed, from where we stood, below the entrance of the Lubar stream twelve miles beneath the head of the glacier. The bottom of the valley was hidden, so we could not see where the ice ended. “That was a *maidan*[2]," he said “all grass and no trees." Longden and I smiled. Guffara forgets many things. Also he believes in spooks and fairies.

But Lor Khan, the most sober, unimaginative of men, said, “It has descended many miles. It has cut off my pasture. I can no longer feed my goats on the hills there." And he pointed to some green patches on the rock far down on the north side of the valley.

“Was it a *maidan*, Lor Khan?"

“*Bilkoo maidan*, Sahib."

We laughed at Lor Khan's “veritable *maidan*" —a figure of speech often in the mouth of the Chilas shikari to reassure the perspiring sahib on the edge of a precipice. “Sahib, a little higher you will find a veritable plain." And the sahib takes heart, though he interprets the phrase rightly, “After ascending a little, if you fall, it will be but two hundred feet and not two thousand as here."

But Lor Khan could not feed his goats, he had lost his pasture. Here was fact distinct from fiction. The next day would show what forces were at work in the valley.

The torrent beneath us was unbridgeable and we turned reluctantly south to Lubar, a wide detour. Here, where the Mazeno, Thoso and Airen passes meet, is a small shepherds encampment, a stone pound like a sangar, with the usual barking dogs and naked children. The shepherds seize the dogs and hold them down as we approach; the urchins run away and hide.

We kill a sheep here. It is the last post of the gujjars. Any tracks beyond will be made by our own men.

VI

The next day, August 17, a ten hours' traverse over the Butesharon ridge and a descent of 8,500 feet brought us to the head of the Diamirai glacier. Standing over the valley we looked down upon the most savage devastation. It was the wildest glacier I had seen, so high were the black and splintered pinnacles raised above the bed of the valley. I felt sure the havoc was in the making. Guffara exclaimed with Biblical gestures; Longden said it was like a huge cemetery or stonemason's yard, it reminded him of Pere Lachaise. Our footsore Pathan cook said it was not a country—it was hell. Little of Nanga Parbat was visible, but our one thought was to reach the ice and we made our traverse so as to strike the glacier near the old moraine, where Mummery had his main camp, just within the wood limit. We pitched our camp there at six in the evening. Guffara was very reminiscent. "Mumri Sahib...Colvie Sahib...Bruce Sahib..." Over the camp fire we heard of the prowess, the sufferings, the extraordinary privations of that gallant band once more.

Guffara and Lor Khan would approach after coffee and squat down by the fire, holding their hands almost in the flame—Guffara dramatic, descriptive, reminiscent, with his old tale of Mummery's neck; Lor Khan silent, like an idol, the repository of experience, only gently communicative upon occasion. We would hear how Bruce Sahib went up a hill like a bullet shot from a gun and how "Mumri Sahib" climbed rocks that had neither hold for hand or foot, crags that would have baffled the markhor and the ibex; and how —here Guffara's voice would become softer—without immediate reason, but simply out of the goodness of his heart, he would put his hand in his pocket—it might be on the top of a peak when he was pleased or it might be on a grassy plain beside his tent after an idle day, "as here"—and take out five rupees and say, "Guffara *pakkarao*," Guffara take this. Here Longden and I would glance at each other and wish our coffers were heavier; and how he would have a sheep killed for the coolies after a hard day—a fat sheep—and it was not always after a very hard day. And then he would tell us about the ridge of muscle on Mummery's neck, which he had never seen on any other man and how he thought it had grown out of the perpetual attack on mountain-faces and how he would watch it from behind when the Sahib was cutting steps in the ice. A dramatic touch this and perhaps imaginary, as his invariable conclusion to the tale, "And all the Sahibs wept."

"And how do you think he died? An avalanche?"

"No, Sahib, there are no avalanches on that side"—another imaginative touch. "I have two thoughts. Either there was new snow on the ice, which fell away and he with it or the demons on the mountain changed him into a fairy."

"And what do you think, Lor Khan?"

"They say in Chilas that Mummery Sahib is still on the mountain."

"A fairy?"

"No, Sahib. Among the fairies. The djinns have kept him there."

It was that very night, eighteen years ago, Mummery and Ragobir had started to make their attempt on the peak. They had slept at the head of the glacier at 15,000 feet and after a second night on the mountain they reached a point of over 20,000 feet, when Ragobir fell ill. Collie writes that nowhere in the Caucasus had Mummery seen anything to compare with the ice-world of Nanga Parbat. "Avalanches had fallen down thousands of feet, set at an angle of over 60 degrees that would have almost swept away towns. The crevasses were enormous and the rock-climbing excessively difficult." But it became easier as they ascended. Most of the difficulties had been already overcome below the upper snowfields and Mummery believed that if he could have reached these higher snows and been able to spend another night on the mountain, he might have reached the summit the next day.

If the party had attacked the mountain first from the Diamarai side instead of from the Rupal nullah, they might perhaps have made the ascent, for from July 18 to August 6 the weather had been fine. It was owing to a fresh fall of snow that Mummery decided to abandon the Diamirai face. A purely snow route now seemed the only chance and they turned to their last hope, the Rakiote nullah. On August 28 Mummery and Ragobir and Goman Singh ascended Diama glacier between Nanga Parbat and the Ganalo Peak (21,650 feet). Hence they intended to cross the Diama Pass and, if it were found practicable, to descend direct into Rakiote; but if this proved dangerous or very difficult, Mummery said he would turn back, as "it was not worth risking anything on an ordinary pass." Sufficient food was left behind in case they had to return the same way. They were never seen again.

Longden and I followed the route taken by Hastings and Collie, crossing into the Ganalo nullah by a col they named the Red Pass and thence by a second pass of 16,500 feet into the Rakiote nullah, where they were to have met Mummery.

VII

On August the 18TH thin mists veiled the mountain intermittently; the summit was not visible until sunset. We explored the glacier all day. The Diamirai valley is broad and straight, facing north-west. One looks down from Nanga Parbat over the tumbled chaos of the serac, beyond the dip where the ice is lost to view, on to the snows of the Trans-Indus range. On both sides there is jungle. Down the centre the lateral moraine stretches clean cut for miles and miles like an enormous railway embankment. Two old moraines on the south side, one overgrown with birches, show that the increase of pressure seems to have been more vertical than horizontal. The great wall, which rises at its highest two hundred and fifty feet above the valley bed, is being dislodged by the impact of new forces and will soon crumble away. Huge blocks of ice, shiny turrets and pinnacles, are lifted up forty or fifty feet above it and hang on its edge, supporting boulders which are continually slipping away, so that the hollow below our tents was being pelted by a stone-shoot all night. Half-way up the moraine the sallows and birches are laid flat, still living; lower down their trunks are broken and bowed and bruised four feet from the ground as if exposed to a regular and continuous fire. We sat on the edge of the new moraine and listened to the forces that were at work all round. We heard a door bang, tins rattling, the clatter of pans, a kitchen dresser upset. The thin shelves of ice crackled and talked all day. Then there would be a quiet furtive burrowing in soft snow or the slow grating sound of small boulders rolling down shale, the angry snap of solid ice, the plunge and slide and impact with the rock. And up above, in the great unseen heights, the snow avalanche gathering its thunder or the still more awful sound of falling crags—a double menace, the sharp, quick crack of the smitten precipice and then the heavy detonation as they find bottom below.

It is an eerie world to be alone in. One can understand how the old monks of Novalesa believed in the devil who threw stones at them when they dared the ascent of the Roche Melon and how the Buddhist pilgrims of Fa Hien's narrative feared the dragon of the Tsung Ling mountains, who spat poison and gravel-stones at them as they passed by. One can even understand how awe and respect could have survived such indifferent marksmanship.

In the evening I found a high perched crag where I could sit and smoke my pipe in peace, immune from the dragon's malice, while he hurled rocks down a stone-slide on either side of me. Between the volleys I watched the shapes in the mist. Down the glacier, in the slanting light after a shower, the jagged towers of dirty ice looked like smooth damp coal. And there was a group of curled, polished blocks contorted like a cubist's nightmare; another cowled and hooded, their dripping black garments falling from their shoulders like the wings of lost angels in an old print. As the sun set, the clouds which had been sweeping over the face of Nanga Parbat and the Diamirai peaks all day lifted and revealed the great north-west wall, fourteen thousand feet of ice and snow and precipice, closed in again and rolled back-wards and forwards in eddies of soft amber light shot with pearl and rose.

When one is directly under a peak which one has not seen from the base, these intermittent glimpses revealed through floating cloud, suggestive of a hidden majesty and aloofness, impress one more than the complete revelation under a clear sky. Perhaps when the curtain seems irrevocably drawn you look up and see a black precipice, a hanging glacier, a redveined rib of rock, framed momentarily in a patch of blue, higher in the sky than you believed possible and then, higher still, an outline of the mountain's white glistening rim, so infinitely remote that you cannot imagine earth raised above it, until near the zenith, as you think, deceived by the cloud-perspective, the real summit swims into view. Early the next morning, perhaps, just as the moonlight is merging in the false dawn, you look out of your tent and see the whole massif, with all its unexpected satellites, sovereign peaks in any other chain. Your pulse may beat quicker, but when you think of the mountain afterwards, it will be the cloud-swept soaring summit, with the rosy mists gathering and dissolving, that you will remember as the true divinity.

VIII

We were more than an hour getting the coolies over the Diamirai glacier. The serac near our camp was impassable and we attacked a spot two miles farther down, where the ice was from three to four furlongs across. Guffara and Lor Khan had been cutting steps early in the morning. Lor Khan had made a portable birch-wood bridge for the crevasses. They were not wide and held no surface snow. The only danger lay in the boulders which hung on the cliffs of ice above our heads: we had heard them falling even in the night. But we avoided the most exposed places and crossed before the sun had power to loosen new debris. We ascended and descended many cold staircases and seldom could we see beyond the wall in front and the wall behind. Guffara, Lor Khan and the two Bunar men waited at the steepest places and helped the coolies down with a rope until they had all crossed. Longden and I went ahead. We were more than ever impressed with the Diamirai glacier and convinced that it had suffered great changes since 1895. In Collie's map its length is about eight miles and it ends some five miles short of the Lubar stream; it has now descended almost to the junction of the two nullahs. We saw the snout for the first time when we were half-way up the pass the next day. Also Collie has represented it as smaller than the Rakiote glacier, which impressed him more; it is now the larger and incomparably the grander of the two. We could not check these details by the Survey of India sheet, which leaves the north and west faces of the mountain blank and we wished we had time to explore the snout of the glacier and that Collie and Bruce and Hastings could have been with us to tell us what forces had been at work since they had been in the valley. There had evidently been some cataclysm, some great ice-flood from which the glacier was labouring still. It was a monster that crushed, devoured, disgorged. We saw the other great glaciers of the massif afterwards. They were formed and set in a mould, spent forces, crawling on, perhaps a foot or two a year. Their ravages were of the past. But this leviathan was alive. Its ribs cracked; its joints groaned; it carried harness on its back. It cut a deeper trough, it raised a higher ruin. And just above its snout it had heaved and stretched itself across the valley and was bursting in the cliffs on either side.

Lor Khan's story might well be true. The glaciers of the Himalaya and Karakoram are governed by no ordinary laws. They gather greater impetus from the tremendous height and precipitousness of the cliffs from which they fall. The Yengutsa glacier in the Hispar district is known to have advanced suddenly at least two miles, swallowing up water-mills and converting a cultivated valley into a waste. The country devastated is described by Conway,[3] who saw, the six mills which are now buried under ice. And there is the authenticated instance of the Hassanabad glacier in Hunza, which is believed to have advanced six miles in two and a half months, threatening villages in its course. In the Diamirai the sudden ice-flood seems to have swept over the surface of the old glacier. This would account for the great height and the larger vertical increase in proportion to the horizontal. Lor Khan pointed to a bare scarp of rock on the first of the Diamirai peaks, where the ice looked as if it had broken off and fallen away in a mass. "It was all glaciers," he said, "in Colvie Sahib's time."

We reached our camp on the north side of the glacier at noon. Lor Khan said he would take us to a spring; but the spring had been engulfed and the great rock, "as big as a house," under which "Colvie Sahib" had pitched his tent, was swallowed up in the ruin. On the north side, too, the glacier was overflowing its own moraine and the trees were bruised and levelled within fifty yards of our tents. Beside this havoc, under the great ugly ravaged embankment, but hidden from it by a group of whispering trees, we camped in one of the loveliest glens I have seen. Under the willows and bushes there was a carpet of swertia, gentian and golden rod. Spires of the tall purple willow herb waved gently in the breeze. And in the margin of the shade, by the open sunlit spaces, summer met autumn in the scarlet of geranium leaves, the red seed of the stone-crop, the crimson stalk and leaf of the wild rhubarb—a crimson so vivid that we could see patches of the plant gleaming like torches in the rocks high above us— brighter even than the berries of the wild rose, among which there were still a few lingering pink blossoms. And wherever we wandered in the forest we came upon little plots of turf where the silver birches had grouped themselves in a ring, silent conscious spaces where Titania might rehearse and all her fays.

On the south side of the glacier there are more of these woods, but on the north there is only a narrow strip of forest left between the debris and the cliff. Soon, perhaps, this too will be engulfed.

IX

In the evening Lor Khan left us. Once or twice I had imagined a struggle in him. He had complained that he found it difficult to walk because of the accident to his leg. I suggested that he should go back and then when Guffara said that he could not be spared so long as we had Chilas men with us, he had come on and in a few minutes his gait had altered. And sometimes when we rested, as he slowly untied the little birch-bark packet in which he kept his *atta*, neat and clean as a parcel from the Stores, he would tell us about his land. He owned many fields and much grazing ground and all of it was good. Lor Khan was the only perfectly contented farmer I had met. He even hoped to find a way to the lost pasturage for his sheep and goats. He was a rich man and he had three small daughters and no one to look after them. We wondered how such an old man could have such young children. And when I was rude enough to ask him his age, he told us he was not yet forty. And now that he had helped us to cross the glacier and pointed out to us the best way to attack the forbidding-looking ridge on the other side, the secret was out, the motive of the half confidences of the hesitating gait in conflict with the evergreen spirit of adventure. It appeared that this little goitred Buddha was preparing for his *seconder noces.* There was a young girl in Bunar...Lor Khan smiled—a benign papal smile. Undoubtedly it was a good match; the maid's parents would be eager in their consent. But I felt sad—young girls are sacrificed in Bunar as in Mayfair; and this one perhaps wept secretly. She might have had a youth with strong white arms who laughed aloud, like the magnificent young stripling who carried my tent.

Lor Khan went off in the evening with all the empty tins in our camp. We hoped he filled them with trinkets for the maid. We were comforted to think that the old man was benevolent.

We left the Diamirai nullah reluctantly, but the men's rations were running short and we had sent Wali Muhammad Khan ahead to bring provisions up to the Ganalo nullah to meet us at the glacier. We followed Collie's route out of the Diamirai valley, over a col he named the 'Red Pass. It was a stiff five hours' ascent from our camp to the summit and Guffara led us too much to the right, so that we had to descend to the col (16,500 feet). The sky was still unclouded, when we reached the pass at eleven. To the south the Diamirai peaks stood out grandly, but the north and west were hazy and the intermediate ridge precluded a view of the Ganalo peak and Nanga Parbat on the east. The north cliff was very steep and the snow too shallow and strewn with stones for a glissade. And there, was a trying descent of three or four thousand feet of shale, I mercifully alternating with loose grit, down which one could slide standing and occasional patches of snow. We reached scrub juniper and water at two, after eight hours' almost continuous going. We did not follow the stream, but traversed a hill to the east to some steep rocks, whence we descended into the Ganalo nullah and camped just below the glacier by a gujjar's hut. The sun setting on the Ganalo Peak and glacier, with the beautifully grouped birches in the foreground, has left a memorable picture in my mind, dwarfish as a mere 21,650 feet peak must seem after the majesty of Nanga.

The next day, August 21, we made a short march of three hours and camped at about 14,500 feet, below the Rakiote Pass, a little above the wood-line. We were all stiff after the four thousand feet of shale and the coolies had had a great deal of climbing on steep rock, where their loads had been a continual hindrance. They had come along with a good spirit all the way, as if the circuit of Nanga Parbat had been a matter on which we had set our hearts independently. For this labour the permanent men were paid at the rate of four pence a day and rations. I remembered frontier difficulties in the Alps and wondered if four pounds would tempt a French or Italian porter to carry a kit-bag twenty miles over a pass.

Another 16,500 feet col took us into the Rakiote valley. We had crossed every pass since the Kamakdhori under a perfectly clear sky. The finest belvedere for the view of the north and west ranges had been the peak above the Khaya. From the passes directly under Nanga Parbat we had glimpses of the same panorama cut off to the north-east or north-west by the spurs that drop down into the Indus.

On the north side of the col we found snow and the first thousand feet were compassed in a few minutes by a glissade to the foot of a crevassed and covered glacier, where we had to leave men to head off the *lumbardar* of Ganalo and others of our train who seemed bent on self-destruction. From this point we looked down on the Rakiote glacier thousands of feet below. No muddy ruin this, but an ordered ice-stream curling white and smooth through the pine trees in its clear cut trough. Between us and it lay an interminable slope of shale, the accursed debris that can make a corvee of climbing in the Himalayas. It was to avoid shale that Mummery and Collie and Bruce twice tried direct passes between the Diamirai and Rupal nullahs, spending a night on an exposed ridge at 19,000 feet and days and nights without food, only to be driven down to it again. Mummery had it in mind when he attempted the Diama Pass into Rakiote. "It was to avoid the incessant scrambling over loose stones," Collie writes. If the pass turned out to be difficult or dangerous he would turn back. An easy resolution in cold blood. But it is hard to imagine Mummery or Ragobir or Goman Singh turning away from the col–if indeed they reached it–a few hours above their camp in the Rakiote nullah and starting back on that tedious four days' coasting traverse in the track of the coolies. The crossing from Diamirai to Rakiote took Collie and Hastings three days, from early in the morning till late at night, though the distance as the crow flies is only ten miles.

We accomplished that shale descent somehow in the heat of noon. And large was the recompense. I found the Rakiote woods more beautiful than any in the world, more sweet-smelling and resinous, the grass in the open spaces softer to lie on, the stream more musical. We cooked our lunch by a chattering brook, with little rocky islands in the clear stream overgrown with geranium and willow-herb and golden-rod. And we looked through the birch and mountain-ash on the glacier. We could see no great dominating peak, but the peculiar beauty of the valley lay in the curve of the wide-sweeping amphitheatre of ice and snow, the precipitous wall that ringed it in from east to west, with a passage in the centre, dropping down into the ice circus below. A pagan theatre for the gods to play in. And to the north the mouth of the valley framed Haramosh and the trans-Indus snows. For three days the sky had been blue and the atmosphere as clear as in October after the rains.

We could not see the north side of the Diama Pass by which Mummery and the two Gurkhas were to have descended into Rakiote until we were far down the valley on the right bank of the stream. I have never seen a more forbidding cliff. If they reached the summit of the ridge—it seems a misnomer to call it a pass—they would have come upon a veritable knife-edge with precipices falling sheer away to a depth of five thousand feet. An ascent to the left towards the Ganalo Peak would have led them to an *arete* which runs into the western feeder of the glacier. This must have been the point that Collie swept hopelessly with his glasses. It will never be known on which side of the pass Mummery's bones lie.

Looking up at those precipices, I thought of another indomitable spirit who, was carried up to his rest in the high peaks and left "loftily lying."

"Our low life was the level's and the night's, He's for the morning."

Mummery has found a grave as fitting, just the resting-place his brave spirit would have chosen.

X

We had kept an open mind about our movements after Rakiote, meaning to strike the Gilgit road either at Doian or Dushkin three days to the east and then to drop down to the Indus at Bunji and return by the road again to Astor or—more heroic measure—to descend one of the nullahs to the bridge across the river at Darrang and up the north cliff to Gor. One thing was agreed. We would not turn our backs on Nanga Parbat until we had seen the north face from the Indus.

As we descended the Rakiote valley, a sudden unexpected turn in the path decided us. From where we stood we looked down on the Indus and the Bunji plain due north, just at the point where the river makes its sharp westward bend into Chilas. Here then was Bunji at our feet, not twenty-five miles distant. We could drop down into the plain direct and include the detour in our circle, instead of turning back *from* the point where we struck the road and covering that much-trodden thorough-fare twice over. Or, if the heat did not altogether cow us, we might still turn back to the bridge at Darrang and climb the north cliff to the Luthu Pass above Gor, though, from all we had heard of the Indus valley in August, we doubted our perseverance in this plan.

And we had reason. If the head of the Rakiote nullah is in Elysium, the foot is in Tartarus. In this valley, if anywhere, one can experience the gamut of mental and physical comfort and distress, bliss and anguish, in one day. High as we were above the river at Rakiote, we had to climb higher before we began the descent, for just below the village the torrent enters an impassable gorge. We started as soon as it was light and the sun was already powerful when we stood upon the thin spur which separates the Buldar valley from the Rakiote. There is probably no better view-point from which to look down upon this scene of desolation. We had entered the bare verdureless hills where nothing grows save the stunted "flame-like" juniper and the rank southernwood. For four or five thousand feet on the opposite slope there was not a tree—then a dark-green patch, spring-fed from above, the village of Gor. The cliffs rose eleven thousand feet above the Indus, fifteen thousand feet above the sea-level. From their ugly barren heights the snow had long melted. The valley was not grand or impressive. There was nothing savage or menacing in it; no beauty of colour or architecture in the hills save the watch-tower crag above Gor; simply naked annihilation on a large scale.

Below us lay the dreaded Indus valley where no man, white or brown, travels by day; where the heat is so intense from May to September that it is forsaken by its scanty population and even by the poisonous Chilas fly. Every traveller on the road to Central Asia has described the scene. One reads of the Indus and follows its snaky white course on the map between countless brown mountain-chains, from its source by the sacred Mansarowar Lake in the Trans-Himalaya to Leh and Skardu and Bunji and Chilas and down through the unknown country between Thur and Amb to Attock in the plains of the Punjab and the desert of Sind, where it becomes a wandering flood, shifting its channel and swallowing up cities until it empties its huge erratic volume of waters into the sea. Here in Chilas it eats its way between the cliffs, moving with labour and strain, a pentup stream narrow and strong and contained, carrying down the snows of the Karakoram, the Himalaya, the Trans-Himalaya, the Hindu-Kush and the Hindu-Raj. A great geographical boundary which I had pictured often and which was now to be burnt into my mind in a way that needed no aid from the imagination.

We were standing on a precipitous cliff of rock and shale some six thousand feet above the river. Every boulder was charged with heat; the shade was fast disappearing. Down this hideous stone-heap we had to descend into a temperature of 110 in the shade. We could see the slaty grey military road stretching away between Jeliper and Lechar. To reach the pass above Gor we should have to turn back down the stream to the bridge at Darrang, climb another fiery slope on the other side and return by the same road. Three more days in Avernus. Painfully we picked our way, searching for a foothold here and there of firm rock to ease the jarring of our steps. Lower down we could see terraces in tiers of about four hundred feet. We tried to reckon our progress by them, but they were interminably repeated.

XI

As the stones became hotter and looser and the shade less I became conscious of a dual personality. The heat had dissolved my ego into two—Number One, the self that desired to see Gor, a remote unsensualised self, troubled by uncomfortable aspirations; and Number Two, the spokesman of the body, whose business it was to protect the physical envelope from the hurt engendered by these vapours. Number Two became a catechist.

"Are you a tripper, a sightseer? Is it not a paltry, vulgar instinct to turn aside to see the 'biggest,' or 'best,' or 'highest' anything in the world? Why are you here? To see the mountains? Why do you leave the mountains?"

"To see them better," answers Number One. "Damn your casuistry."

And Number One maintains a feeble ascendancy as far as the next terrace. But here again the catechist is at his ear.

"What is independence? Have you none? Are you not a slave to the superlatives bandied about among travellers–mere catchwords–hearsay?"

The complex personality struggles on, at strife with itself and the elements.

At the next terrace there was shade under a high-pointed rock. In this grateful spot the catechist must have abandoned tart rebuke, for Number One is haunted by old refrains, "Two voices are there... And one is of the mountains"..."and bring with thee the mountain-nymph, sweet Liberty."

In the next lap Number One and Two argue amicably.

"Besides, *is* it the finest view? Gor itself is 8,000 feet, 4,000 feet above the Indus and you are nearly twenty-five miles away from the mountain. Now in the Diamirai nullah...." Here Number Two took over charge. "In the one case you look up 14,000 feet sheer above your head; in the other you look up 18,000 feet across a distance of twenty-two miles."

The grave of Number One is marked by a loose heap of stones 2,500 feet above the Indus bed.

It was here I envied Yorke. There was a three-foot shadow, the last and I sat in it until the sun had crept on to the small of my back. Every stone had begun to hold and remit intense heat. Longden had not said a word about Gor. I watched him get up limply and stumble on. I guessed by the angle of his neck that his tongue was hanging out. He lifted his feet with pain. His boots, which he had burnt in the campfire under the Kamakdhori, were hanging together by string. I thought of Coryat, who travelled 1,975 miles in one pair of shoes and hung them up afterwards as an exvoto in the church of his native village. I looked at mine and wondered how long they would last; the seams were going at the toes. A wave of homesickness came over me as I was carried away by the sight of them to a spot where trippers alight with a weekend ticket from Waterloo. I had bought them at Okehampton two years before. They were readymade, for time pressed and

I tried them with grave misgiving on the white road. The nails were hammered in while I lunched at the White Horse. Afterwards I met my crony and trudged with him out into the moor. A bog or two soon put me on good terms with the boots. It was a misty day and the low veiled hills looked immense, but in the evening the sun broke through the clouds and lit up the heather and the uncompromising grey and brown became a rosy-coloured wilderness. We lay in an old stone-circle, built by prehistoric men for the orientation of some star and watched it set limned against Yes Tor.

I had never felt so near earth, such a sense of the oldness of the world. It was a kind of mellow happiness in long inheritance, a thankfulness in every pore for this rock and heath and scrub and pasture and for one's part in the soil. One could pray for another incarnation under the same soft sky, to be borne here again in an eddy of the same life-wave which brought the Celt and stone-age man. The feeling was homely and physical; it was of the bone and blood, not of the mind. Asia cannot inspire it. Let your mind range there and you are a detached atom wandering in the infinite, unconsidered in the general plan, not knit up with life. And it is not through any homing spirit or sense of defiliation that we feel this. The Asiatic by his own hearth feels the thinness of his attachment to earth and counts it to his credit. He is the more spiritual, he thinks, because he is the less earthy; his written lore is steeped in this cold philosophy. But the difference lies in the virtue of the soil; it affects the less evolved mammals and the vegetable world as well as man. An apologist for the East might write a fable upon the unspiritual cabbage which was too European-hearted.

The turf in the stone-circle was thick and matted. I dug the spike of my stick into it; the mould underneath could only be discovered by prods. The turf of Asia is thin and sparse "as hair in leprosy." It is all the difference between the scalp of youth and age or rather, of fresh old age and tired old age.

We left the charmed circle reluctantly and struck south-east by the compass. It was dark when we stumbled down a hill of bracken and through a young beech copse to a farm, the lights of which had drawn us to the edge of cultivation as a boat to the coast. Then three miles of sweet-scented road and lane, the screech of the tawny owl, the moonlit mystery of the folded fields and we came into Chagford. It was Saturday night and there was a hum and bustle in the streets. The villagers were shopping; the chemist's lights attracted them like moths. We could see a bench of rustics through the window of the barber's shop waiting for their weekly shave. And then we came to the lights of our own inn. I thought of it all the way down to Lechar. There were beef and fruit-tart with cream and Stilton cheese; and no tents to put up; and a nice clean-aproned girl with red hair and a fresh skin and a friendly laugh.

When we reached what had seemed to us, as we looked down, the uttermost bottom of the pit, we found we were still five hundred feet above the river bed. The heat was not latent and insidious, it was aggressive, it struck and buffeted. I remembered a phase in a forgotten letter, "Thence down to Yoway in hell," and the idea came into my head that I was going down to Yoway and ever since I had thought of the foot of that stone-heap as Yoway. It may have been or may not, I never verified the name.

We reached the road at noon and found it silent and deserted. There were no other lost spirits on that burning marl. We had still two and a half miles between us and the rest-house at Lechar, with its shelter of trees and little irrigated patch of lucerne planted to feed the transport ponies that bring in supplies to Chilas.

XII

At Lechar that night the storm broke; the heat had been abnormal even for Chilas. I left the rest-house by the ghostly moonlight and took the road to Bunji, fifteen miles to the north; the shadows lent the valley the mystery it lacked by day. Silent figures passed me without greeting. I could not hear their footsteps for the din of the stream which sounded to me always dissyllabic, a double saw-like burden of labour and strain. Two miles out of Lechar I crossed the historic mud-slide, where the cliff on the left bank subsided into the river and formed a dam behind which the valley became a lake as far as the junction of the Hunza and Gilgit Rivers, thirty-five miles to the north-east. The water broke through and caused the great flood of 1841, in which the Sikh army was destroyed in the plains near Attock. The hillside has been slipping continually ever since; the mud had overflowed the path in the night and I sank in it over the ankles.

As the darkness became thinner I looked back anxiously towards the mountain. The clouds had lifted, but they were hanging ominously above its summit. I reached Ramghat at sunrise and had to confess that there was something grand and impressive in the way the gaunt hills fell back from the narrow gorge of the Astor River. Here the Gilgit and Chilas roads join. The famous view of the north face of Nanga Parbat from near Bunji is to be seen two miles beyond. At the bridge I met some pack ponies returning without loads. I chose the best and pushed on. My luck had held. The weather was evidently breaking up, but the sky was clear. The whole of the north face was visible. There were the two great northward-pointing dormers above Rakiote, from which the precipices, by some illusive foreshortening, seemed to fall sheer into the river beneath. A grand culmination to the view down the bleak valley, but not so superb as the Diamirai cliff.

I have heard the north face described as the finest mountain view in the world, just because of that declivity. I felt that it ought to be, but that it was not. No doubt by rule and computation it could hold its own; but the touchstone is the spirit, in great mountains as in great poetry or prose. Sublimity is measured by the exaltation it inspires. I have often heard and read of the view of the north wall from near Bunji and must confess disappointment. Conway was tempted by it for a moment to turn back from K2; it inspired the most eloquent passage in his ''*Climbing and Exploration in the Karakoram Himalayas.*" He thought the ascent possible. "No, extraordinary difficulties," he writes, "other than those pertaining to the altitude and the state of the snow, appear to bar the way." And it has captured the imagination of Younghusband, who dwells on its isolation, though he compares it in declivity with Rakiposhi, 25,550 feet, which rises sheer from the Hunza River (5,000 feet) below and with a peak in the Pamirs (25,146 feet) rising abruptly from the plains of Turkestan, where they are little more than 8,000 feet above sea-level. Mrs Bullock Workman though moved to admiration, does not hold that the north face is the grandest aspect of the peak. "Try as one can, it is difficult to realise that 22,000 feet." She considers that the most impressive view is from the

Bannokla to the east, a pass of over 16,000 feet. But this can only include some 10,000 feet of the mountain seen from a distance of twenty-five miles. And what subtle charm of grouping can make up for the majesty of the north cliff? None the less, in spite of figures and statistics, one feels that there is something that detracts from the reverence which is due and which one has come prepared to pay. For some reason the mind does not receive the full impression. After all, there are the eight leagues between the summit and the valley where you stand, every mile of which lops the stature of the peak, though it does not diminish the sense of precipitousness as much as one might think. For although I had traversed many weary miles from the glacier to the river, my eye received the illusion of the ice almost overhanging the bed of the stream. Nor do I think the actual summit is visible. Perhaps from Gor, though it is only three miles nearer as the crow flies, the whole of that tremendous declivity is realised. Bruce, who knows the Himalayas from end to end, says there is no finer mountain view in the world. Younghusband, in weighing the claims of other great peaks, with those of Nanga Parbat, inclines to Kanchenjunga. Probably there is no view more sublime than that of the peak seen from the Singlila ridge on the Nepal frontier, where one is almost ringed in by the giants of the earth—the Nepal ranges, with Everest and Makalu to the west; the giant Sikkim peaks filling the north; Kanchenjunga, Jannu, Pandim, Siniolchum, the Bhutan chain closing in the circle to the east; and the tremendous forest-clad valleys falling away at one's feet. And then I remember another view from a peak (18,200 feet) above the Phembula, north of Lhasa, where the imagination is carried away— not by any commanding peak or chain, but by endless ranges of the same height, stretching away like the furrows of infinity, at first rough and billowy and then in the far distance, where the twin peaks guard the Tengri Nor, like the wrinkled surface of a plain. If the mind ever conceives the infinite, it will not be through the effect of mere declivity or interminable level spaces, but by the aid of serried heights like these, where distance merges the vertical in the horizontal as in another dimension. But heaven forbid that mountains should be judged by bulk, weighed in the scale like cod or salmon! There are scenes that will occur when the impression of this Bunji vievr has become faint—scenes of haunting mystery, as where the divinity of Chumulari is reflected in the sleeping waters of the Bam-tso; scenes memorable for some peculiar colour or grace or boldness, as where the white peak of Kailas in Bussahr rises in columns of coloured crag above the Sutlej and other aspects of Nanga Parbat herself, the great Diamirai cliff from below the summit and the snow amphitheatre of Rakiote seen through the mountain-ash and birches.

I stayed in Bunji till the evening. Here I was within a day's ride of Gilgit. We were to have spent a weekend there; but my friend, who was going to lay out a *dák* of ponies for us and put us up, had been called away to the other end of the Agency. In the evening I returned to Ramghat, where I met Longden. We camped in the rocks in a storm. In Kashmir, we learnt afterwards, they were having a week's downpour; but in this dry gorge we were exposed to sound and fury more than anything else—much wind and dust and a few drops of rain.

Nanga Parbat has an ill, though I think undeserved, reputation for dirty weather. Probably she is more immune than most great peaks. Kanchenjunga is invisible for weeks at a time—from May to the end of September—and Freshfield and his party ran into a cyclone when he made his tour of the mountain late in the season. The Eckenstein party camped for seven weeks at 20,000 feet on the slopes of K2, but were held back by cloud and snow. Conway's experience of the mountain is well known and the Abruzzi expedition met with no better weather. If Nanga Parbat is unassailable, it is not for climatic reasons. Mummery made his attempt on the peak in cloudless weather in mid-August, 1895. From July 18 to August 6 it had been gloriously fine. And here is the peak's record in 1918: August 14, cloudless till midday, evening misty; 15TH, clear, evening stormy; 16TH, clear; 17TH, 18TH, light floating mists; 19TH, 20TH, 21ST, 22ND, cloudless; 23RD, a storm at night; 24TH, the north face clear all day, weather broke at night.

XIII

I will not describe the much-trodden Gilgit road. We followed it three and a half stages. Thirteen miles beyond Astor I turned into the Rupal nullah to see the south face of Nanga Parbat. At Astor Longden had collected the essentials of life, packed them on a baggage pony and pushed on by double stages over the Kamri Pass to the Wular Lake in Kashmir. Thence by boat to Srinagar—hotels, comfort, civilisation. "Three faces to a mountain are enough," he said and pursued the road, preferring the physiognomy of man. We had been marching twenty-eight days, with only three halts. He had been twenty-seven days without a newspaper or a letter; he had finished the five volumes of economic history and all the books he or I had taken with us—French or English; and he had seen three faces of the peak. Under the Kamakdhori his boots had fallen into the camp fire and Guffara used to stitch them up in the evenings with patches of tough markhor hide. In these he had attacked some of the stiffest country in the world, though he had not my gipsy bent or the love of flowers and mountains. One would expect moods from a man in such a case, tacked on to a wandering fanatic "just to see what it was like." But Longden has no "humps or hollers" in his nature. He would sit down in shale or snow or wet earth and discourse, as if he had been at his own breakfast-table, on any subject that came into his head or mine. A philosopher to the bone. "Do you like this sort of thing?" I would ask him. We would be resting perhaps near the foot of a hot, steep pass, with three thousand, more feet to climb and no likelihood of water.

"Frankly, I do not; but talking of...." And as he brushed away a venomous Chilas fly or dislodged a sharp stone that was running into his person, he would descant on heredity, on John Crome or Confucius or whoever or whatever it might be.

I parted from Longden sadly, but I was glad to be quit of the dusty highway. The four stages from Ramghat had been a tedious interlude, though the break in the weather had come opportunely. Nanga was hidden by intervening ridges and the light, misty drizzle cooled the dull road for us, where miles are marked on posts as if the day's march were a penitential round, where there is no solitude and where one has to halt or mend one's pace if one does not want to tread on the heels of mules, drabies, dak-runners, rice-tats, commissariat Babus—all that is drawn into the supply of Gilgit. And after sleeping in bungalows where rules and tariffs are posted on the wall, it is good to camp in flowers again under the glacier, to lie in the grass by a big fire and watch the mist drift and dissolve from the face of the mountain. I did not see the south face that day. When it was almost dark one burnished cloud, straight and level as a bar, hid the last five hundred feet of the summit. The perfect night came too late and it was only by watching one star sink in the west after another that I learned where the highest snow pierced the sky.

Before daybreak it had clouded over. My camp was on the right bank of the river, opposite Tarshing. In the morning I crossed the Chiche stream by a slippery pine-trunk near the glacier and climbed the ridge (1,200 feet) that separated the two nullahs. I took up water and spent the day on the top with Collie's book beside a fire. The Nanga Parbat glacier, with its high moraine, lay at my feet and I could see far away up the valley the Rupal and Mazeno glaciers fifteen miles distant. I was but a day and a half from the shepherds' encampment at Lubar where, we had first touched the actual flanks of the mountain. I did not complete the ring here, but left a wobbly balloon-like tail to my track on the map, which joined up at Sopore. "*Me voici*," as my friend X would have said. I had almost woven the mystic circle. Whether my intellect had "become sharpened by going round mountains," to quote my Pundit's rendering of the Yaju Veda or whether I had become "of godly temperament," Longden alone can say. I had certainly attained the "intellectual happiness" assured in the Kedarkalpa. And I had only envied Yorke once—on the stone-heap above Yoway, though I felt the little Gallic thrill by every campfire.

"*Me voici dans les solitudes éternelles de...* "

Thus my gifted friend began his first and only book of travel, feeling that bald English was inadequate. He did not write more than one paragraph and there was no need, for his parody, delivered with rolling "r's" and contorted eyebrows and inimitable slow gestures, held the germ of many volumes—just the touch that converts the traveller's campfire, round which he is haggling for transport or the price of a fowl, into the playground of unfamiliar genii and peeping fays.

"*Me voici plougé dans les solitudes éternelles des montagnes et des vastes forêts—moi seul et le bon Dieu.*"

Certainly the Gaul has the pull in a book of travel and deserves it, if language grows out of a people's temperament and needs. He is conscious everywhere of the quiet gliding of snakes in the brushwood. He must return to shelter at night before the hour of the tiger. The visionary gleam rests upon him wherever he moves, in *les forêts touffues, profondes, et souvent impénétrables*, where *le tigre se glissant la nuit jusqu'au campement est arrêté net d'un balle entre les deux yeux* or where *les serpents déroulent leur tortueux anneaux á travers les herbes* and *les lianes s'entortillent partout.*

Here an Englishman could only say "where the creepers are thick," or worse, if he wanted to write like a book, "festoon the forest." Still our laconic countryman may be as happy in his way though he does not admit thrills. X fears sentiment as he would a dickey or elastic-sided boots. So when he feels the inwardness of a place he must laugh to himself and at himself in French. I heard him discussing Ladakh and Baltistan with a friend.

"Know Skardu? Yes: I had to tramp 320 miles on my flat feet for two head and poor ones at that."

A minute afterwards I heard his friend say–

"The duck-shooting at Syracuse isn't worth the candle."

Now it is not possible that X or his friend could drift stolidly from Skardu to Sicily with never a "*me voici*," or a thought of old Nicias. So I take it their indifference masks a reverence for the high and ancient places of the earth or they would not go. There are clay-pigeons and moving targets if they wish to stay at home.

"*Me voici dans les solitudes éternelles de Nanga Parbat,*" but I wondered if I were going to see the south face and if not, how long I should stay in the valley. The sun came and went, the kettle boiled twice; I fed and read and smoked and slept, but the clouds never lifted. In the evening a squall came up from the south and drove me to my camp.

XIV

Very early the next morning I heard Guffara's voice outside my tent. "Sahib, heaven is clean." I looked out and saw the south face. The great ridge fell away to an abrupt chasm behind the Rakiote Peak, where the black needle rock thrusts out of the snow like a cairn. To the north-east, as far as one could see, it declined in a long featureless snow wall. After exploring the Rupal nullah, Mummery abandoned the idea of attacking the mountain from the south, in spite of the relative ease with which supplies could be brought in to his base camp from Kashmir. Collie thinks an advanced camp of at least 20,000 feet would be necessary. He has reckoned the acclivity at about 15,000 feet in two miles. Nevertheless, Nanga seemed dwarfed to me from this side, her stature lopped, her divinity impaired. It may have been the absence of any architectural grace or boldness; or it may have been that the angle of the bare sloping buttresses diminished the sense of height—there did not appear to be 7,000 feet of ice and snow on the south face. Where was the glory of Diamirai, the superb throned amphitheatre of Rakiote? The truth is, I was spoilt. Even the Rupal valley had seemed bare and ordinary the day before, a few sparse trees, some niggard cultivation, then the dingy debris-strewn glacier, the grey shale leading up to the snow. Earlier in the season perhaps there is more colour, but the road and all the nullahs that entered it had seemed flowerless after Rakiote.

To anyone coming from the south the view might be impressive. But I had seen the west and north; I had entered the circle at the wrong point. Longden was wiser than he knew, I thought as I struck my tent. The Rupal nullah is the backyard of Nanga Parbat. Three faces to a mountain are enough. And yet how fairylike, ethereal, lifted above earth, the south face seems a hundred miles away in Kashmir.

The road became beautiful again as we approached and crossed the frontier. We had left the long needled pine behind and the mast-like abies clothed the hills, more graceful in its outline than any other mountain tree except the deodar and birch. The countless little bogs and springs on the hillside were ablaze with flowers. The spires of the dark blue aconite made a brave show in the floor of the valley; and in the little streamlets that form at the foot of the snow gullies there were beds of corydalis, splashes of intense gold paling the golden-rod and ragwort on the slopes below. The bright pink pedicularis with the white eye grew on each side of the runnels, thick as a planted border all along. And there were masses of the mauve-coloured leek, mixed with geranium and forget-me-not, a sea of colour. I never imagined that anything of the genus onion could satisfy the eye.

After four days we had crossed the Kamri Pass into Kashmir and were in the balsam and larkspur country again. Here were golden-rod, meadow-sweet, the branching anemone, codonopsis, marjoram, saxifrage, columbine, wallflower and a dozen different labiates of different shades of blue. In the five weeks we had been weaving our circle round Nanga Parbat we had passed through every kind of country and it was pleasant to end in the garden where we began.

END NOTES:

1. "*Climbing on the Himalaya and other Mountain Ranges*" by J Norman Collie, Edinburgh: David Douglas.
2. Plain.
3. "*Climbing and Exploration in the Karakoram Himalayas.*"

4

MINERVA AND THE HOUSEBOAT

I

On my return from Baltistan Minerva met me on the houseboat. It has always been one of the crosses of life that she and I cannot take our holidays together. In civilised places we read the same books, play the same games, like the same people, have much the same ideas about ultimate things, but Minerva will not rough it. She has never possessed a pair of strong boots, she cannot drink out of thick cups and the mere vicinity of an insect makes her uncomfortable.

We both like travel books, but for different reasons. The volumes I read with envy Minerva enjoys with a furtive humorous malice. She reclines on soft cushions and follows the self-inflicted miseries of fanatics on icebergs or deserts or mountain chains. She is particularly well up in Arctic exploration. But she prefers to read of women travellers being eaten alive deservedly—she is not deceived by the pretext of science—by mosquitoes or, worse, their hands and faces blistered by the sun. She has a certain smile which draws me curiously to her shoulder sometimes when she is reading. It will be a picture of a blizzard in "Misery Camp," the tents battened down and a human figure emerging from one of them, a living icicle; or a tropical scene, with a photograph of some uncouth sportswoman with short, fat, puttied legs, who travels for pleasure and loses her temper at every rub.

"I am sure she beats her coolies," Minerva says, turning over the pages daintily.

It is difficult to arrange a holiday with Minerva, for the primitive and pagan in me must be indulged and my Elysium is her Tartarus—a kind of illimitable snipe-jheel, with blue mountains on the horizon and a strange wild country beyond. Here Minerva pictures me wallowing in mud and blood. It is true I like mud and I do not mind a little blood. A few drops spilt on one's shorts are sacrificial, the rite we pay to the little caveman within us when we cast the social slough. And I like to feel my neck and knees bare to the wind and sun. I like to bathe in a lake or stream and dry in a warm breeze, lying in grass and flowers— one's pipe is sweeter for the absence of a shirt; and I like to feel a few warm feathers sticking to my sleeve or the scales of a fish. The smell of these things is sweet—it brings one nearer earth.

Yet I find that I am not such good company to myself as I was. Also Minerva loves travel, she says, if she does not have to rough it. She likes to be there, but not to go. She does not mind the simple life. So we hit on the houseboat as a kind of limbo—a between-state, in which we both might be content. A simple device which we might have thought of before. Minerva was to meet me on the Wular Lake in Kashmir on my way back from a trek in the snows. We had heard of a nicely furnished boat with its staff of servants ready. My last stage would take me straight into her drawing-room. That she might be delivered from all spiders, daddy-long-legs, mosquitoes, hard beds, coarse crockery— all roughnesses, by the way—was my constant litany.

I shall never forget my first glimpse of the Wular Lake from the pass above Tragbal. Drought and vertical cliffs had been my portion for the last five weeks and water in the form of turbid glacier streams at an angle of forty-five degrees. I longed for level spaces. And here was a plain, twenty-five miles broad, glittering in the sun like a coat of divers colours, varied by the different crops—young rice, ripe corn, the rich green of the maize, the yellowish-brown seed-flax, the red and ochre of the parched *karewas*, relieved by clustered villages embowered in walnut, poplar and chinar, a broad slow river winding through it and at my feet a wide expanse of still water on which boats floated lazily. This is the best view in Kashmir, I thought and wondered if *The Snark* were in the creek. I camped that night on an exposed spur in the forest between two beacon fires, my prearranged signal with Minerva.

The Snark was in port all right—a clean, dainty boat, with an interior worthy of its attractive outside. A stiff white tablecloth and fruit and drinks on the table, frilled muslin: curtains, cushions, rugs, books, newspapers and other good things which one can appreciate when they have ceased to be a matter of course—especially if one has earned them by the expenditure of all waste tissue. They offered the picture of a month's ideal loafing.

Nevertheless the beginnings of our cruise were not auspicious. First there were the mosquitoes. They were so persistent and venomous that we gave up the idea of exploring the lake and made for less swampy surroundings. Minerva lunched in gloves and veil. Eventually we were driven into our mosquito curtains, feeling as if we had been licked all over by a flame. I had not roughed it so much for months.

Then there was Mushtaq. The second course at lunch betrayed him—a chicken mould of a peculiar shape, fortified by tomato slips with a sliced egg on the top, the palpable handiwork of the *badmash* who had been my *khansamah* (cook) in camp. A lazy, malingering, thievish, plausible fellow, who had looted the villagers, turned up late in camp, kept me waiting for meals and destroyed an otherwise respectable temper and digestion. Through his pilfering I had been reduced to commissariat tea, bazaar coffee, "scissors" cigarettes and other sundry abominations, until I had met a Samaritan on the road and messed with him the last two stages. I had dismissed the man on the spot and here he was on the boat—a hideous resurrection.

"Good heavens," I said to Minerva, "you have got Mushtaq!"

"Didn't you send him on?"

"I sacked him."

It appeared that Mushtaq had arrived the evening before, all salaams, saying that the Sahib had sent him on to get everything ready. Minerva had had to leave the boat cook behind at Srinagar, as his sobriety had left much to be desired. She thought Mushtaq a dear old man, so polite and willing, "a little ugly perhaps." He had a face like a Jew transmogrified into a goat, something remotely Semitic and capricious. He was of mixed ancestry, a Pathan father and a Kashmiri woman of the Lolab valley and he had inherited the virtues and good looks of neither.

"The infernal old humbug," I said. "I suppose we are saddled with him."

Still he had prepared a very tolerable lunch. Minerva was all for giving him another chance. The easy regime of a houseboat might mean reformation, though I had failed to whip the offending Adam out of him.

We could not leave Bandipur that night. The manjhi[1] was afraid to put out into the lake. These boats are high and have no draught; a squall upsets them. We took refuge in the mosquito curtains. We read and dozed and talked to each other through gauze. The idea occurred to us of being fed through the net, but we made brave sallies to the dining-room. The next day, too, we had to keep under cover. We punted across the lake, two poles in front and a paddle behind, the cook boat and shikara following in our wake. When we reached firm earth on the Jhelum bank the towing-rope was brought out. Here the enemy were not in such force and we emerged and walked by the side.

The next morning we breakfasted in peace, both agreed on the definition of happiness–the absence of mosquitoes. It gradually began to dawn on us that Minerva would not have to rough it at all and that I had laid the ghost of the caveman in me for at least a month. *The Snark* was going to be a success.

II

Srinagar was our first port. For some reason the mosquito limit is a fixed geographical boundary at this time of the year. We left it behind at Sumbal and were troubled no more. At Srinagar we moored in the Jhelum two miles above the city, but spent most of our days on the Dal Lake or in the old Mughal gardens that slope down to it. The city itself reeks with the dirt of ages. The Mar Canal, which runs through the most picturesque quarter, is only approachable when it is flushed by the fresh snow water in spring. But in the evening sometimes we would drop down the Jhelum between the seven bridges; in the open stream one is assailed only by intermittent whiffs. Like all dirty, picturesque old Eastern cities built on a river bank, it is best seen from a boat. One escapes the smells and the pressing crowds and the pert, inquisitive children who follow on one's heels; and the household routine goes on as one glides slowly by. It is the women who give colour to the scene. They are always working or gossiping by the river-side, cleaning their brass pots or washing their clothes or weaving or grinding corn. Their features are regular, their eyes bright and clear. The young girls are unusually fair; in Europe they would be taken for Jewesses. They wear a kind of jibbah with loose, upturned sleeves; the brilliant colours—magenta, green, terracotta, purple— glow in strong relief against the quiet tones of the old wood and brick. We passed a marriage party going downstream to the village of the bride; or perhaps the husband was taking her to his home. A bright canopy was hung over the prow and they were all singing. "Happy" is the translation of the Eastern word the family would apply to the chorus, but to our ears their music is infinitely sad. The marriage chant sounded like a dirge.

A pretty girl looked out at us from a latticed balcony on the third storey. A young man by her side took her by the elbow and thrust her roughly back into the chamber. But there was no finality in the action and she came out to peep at us again. For her sake we looked down. An old hag next door stared at us unreproved—a commonplace little allegory for the moralist which I will not pursue. The wicked Occidental habit of peering about for pretty faces is wickeder in the East. The Oriental, as a rule, has better manners than we in this respect, but we passed a family barge in which a consequential young Muhammadan was sitting before his two wives. As we approached he gave the nearest an unceremonious nudge, as much as to say, "Look quickly, here is something you will not see again." And the two bourkhas bent forward so that I could see the eyes peering through the veil at Minerva. But they did not turn round. At the next ghat an English girl had braved the smells and was sitting on the steps painting. She wore a brown dress with a low neck and her complexion was very fair. Every figure that passed made her look more dainty and clean.

Earthquakes may demolish Srinagar, but the city will always be picturesque. With the brick and stone and wood now used even the new houses look old. Rasula, the manjhi, told me that there were a thousand mosques and ziarats in the city and I can well believe it. All the buildings are balconied; most of them have three or four storeys. The windows and eaves are richly fretted; at the corners of the roof the cedar wood is carved and ornamented, generally in the shape of hanging campanulas. The wood is of a rich dark grain. The bricks are small and dark—they never have that ugly new yellowish-red tint which we think of as brick colour. But it is the roofs that give the city its peculiar charm. They are flat or gently sloping and covered with earth. Each roof is a garden. In spring they are bright with iris and crocus and in the autumn they are coloured with the quiet tints of the dried leaves and grasses.

The waterways by the lake have another charm. We spent many a lazy morning in the channels by the Dal watching the craft coming back from the floating gardens with their market produce. The boats are of all sizes, from the heavy thatched grain-barges that house a family to the light shikara. They are paddled or punted; sometimes an old woman or a small girl in a purple or magenta shift will be the sole crew; or there may be the three ages of women in the same boat. They are carrying vegetables or fruit or fodder to the city— cucumbers and melons and singhara nuts, coxcombs for colouring food, marigolds, lotus pods, white lotus stalks gathered under water near the root and tied up in bunches like celery. We pass a boatload of enormous pumpkins, propelled slowly by a quiet old hag in the prow; shikaras laden with wood or hay or water weed, rushes for matting or reed for thatch. The water weed is for cow-fodder; the reek of it is sweet in the sun. The sodden green willow wood is stowed for winter fuel. It has a peculiar pungent smell when drying, which is as sweet as the hay, because of some vague memory it stirs, so vague as to be little more than a sensation. We pass a barge of wise contented-looking sheep changing pasture; as it touches land the leaders step ashore in a matter-of-fact way, as if they were in charge and had demanded the ferry. The splash of crimson emerging from a shaded willow alley is a barge loaded with coxcomb, pure crimson lake. There are gardens of it in the dry patches between the dykes, a rich warm glow of colour. And there are fields of marigolds which every orthodox Pandit brings daily to strew on the lingam or in the niches by the altar. We pass a village with a temple to Siva and another with a ziarat built of cedar and red brick, with a thatched roof covered with irises in seed and shaded by chinars. This is Hazratbal; it contains a hair of the prophet's beard.

There is a tinge of autumn in the air and in the trees. The reed-beds are brown or sulphury, the sapphire of the kingfisher on the wall is brighter against the yellow mulberry leaves; there is a rufous fringe under the bank and in the water the surface weeds are tinted. We pass orchards of apples and yellow crinkled quinces and plantations of young willows, intersected by innumerable creeks, at the end of which there is always a glimpse of the hills, sometimes the yellow rock of Hari Parbat, with the old fort sprawling over it or the thimble-like Takht-i-Sulaiman or the brown crags above the Dal or to the south the Pir Panjal rimmed with fresh snow.

These late September mornings follow one another in peaceful succession; a turquoise sky with barely a cloud, a fresh nipping air which makes one feel as if one has just bathed; and a sweet smell everywhere so long as one avoids man.

Rasula, our boatman and his mate, belong to the aristocracy of the river. It adds to one's content to be propelled sympathetically by men one knows and likes. We gather much lore from them.

Farther down the stream we came upon three legendary stones, two in the channel, one half covered by willows in a ditch. Rasula told us that these were once bad men, who had been petrified for some wickedness. One is a matting-maker who spoke false words; another a gujjar who put water in the milk; another a dhobie who stole a silken robe or, as others say, a bunniah who dealt crookedly.

"As today," I said.

"Ha, sahib, as today," the manjhis echoed sorrowfully.

"What a stone-heap the land would be if such justice were meted out today."

"Ha, sahib, a veritable stone-heap," intones Stroke.

"Assuredly a heap of stones," echoes Bow.

"Are not the people afraid?"

"But it was so long ago."

"Is not Khuda[2] as powerful now?"

"Khuda knows," intones Stroke.

"Khuda is all knowing, but his ways are dark," echoes Bow.

Minerva and I were agreed that the person most in danger of petrification in all Kashmir was Mushtaq. I came in the next morning at the hour of accounts.

"All sahibs pay eight annas a day for wood," he was saying.

"Mushtaq," I began gravely, "there are three stones in the canal at Kraliyar, you are aware. These were once wicked men. Now, if..."

"Sahib," the old man said, in a voice that vibrated with injured feeling, "I have never defrauded any sahib or mem-sahib. God is witness of my doings. If I have taken one pice that is the mem-sahib, may I be struck...."

The invocation was so solemn and awful I half expected to see the old man fall on the carpet. Minerva interposed hurriedly to save him.

"But the mem-sahib in the next boat only pays three annas."

"Ha, mem-sahib. But that mem-sahib has lunch served cold. Moreover, the Huzoor and the mem-sahib have hot baths in the morning and in the evening; but the mem-sahib in the next boat only bathes..."

"Never mind the mem-sahib on the next boat," I said. "Write down three."

The figure of Mushtaq underwent a subtle change. His shoulders, back and neck became reproachfully limp and martyr-like as he resigned himself to the loss of five annas a day, almost as much as half his pay.

"We too will have a cold lunch today," Minerva added consolingly. "We are taking tiffin out to the Nishat Bagh."

"As the lady sahib pleases."

The tone of his voice as he retreated implied as clearly as the spoken words, though quite consistently with respect, "I am a poor, honest, wronged man. But with such sahibs and mem-sahibs argument and justice are alike impossible."

We both felt uncomfortable.

"Are you sure three annas are enough?" Minerva said.

Dizful.

The Tomb Of Daniel. Shush.

Sheikh's Camp Near Ahwaz

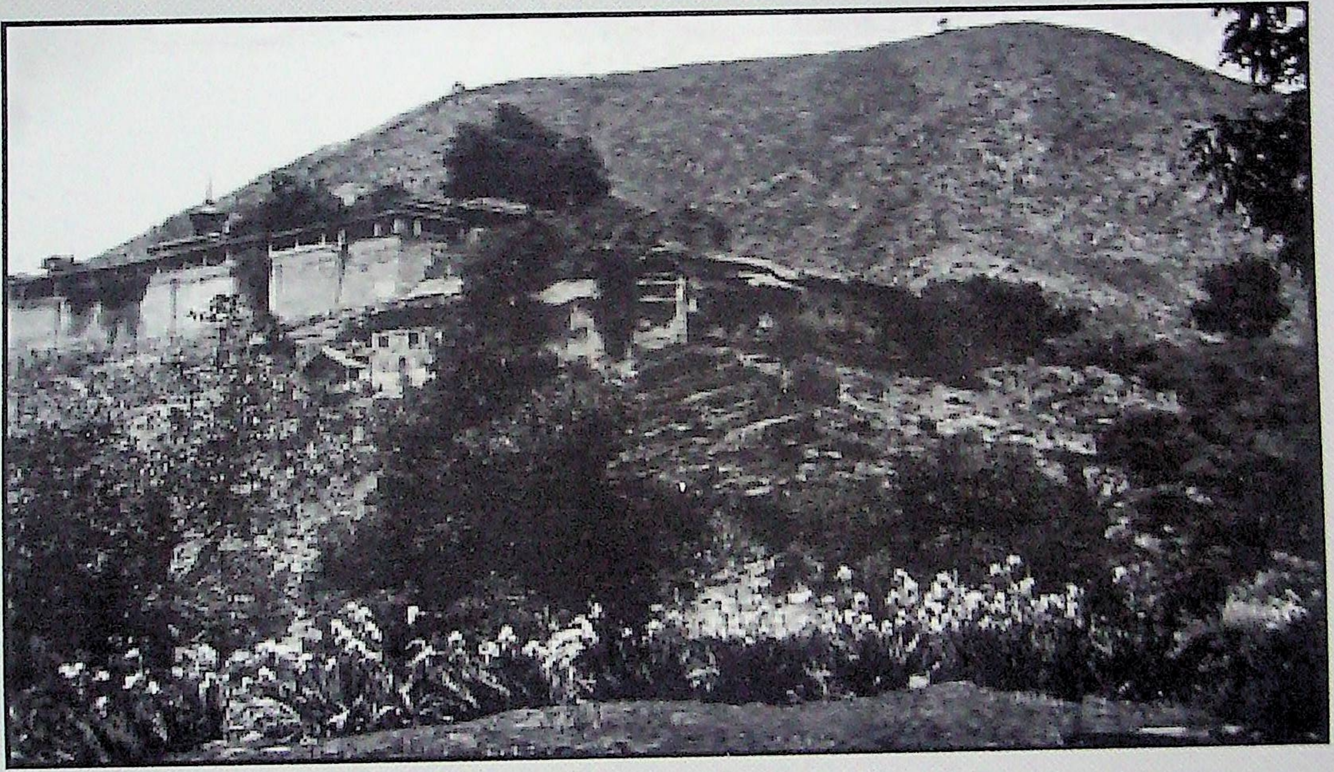
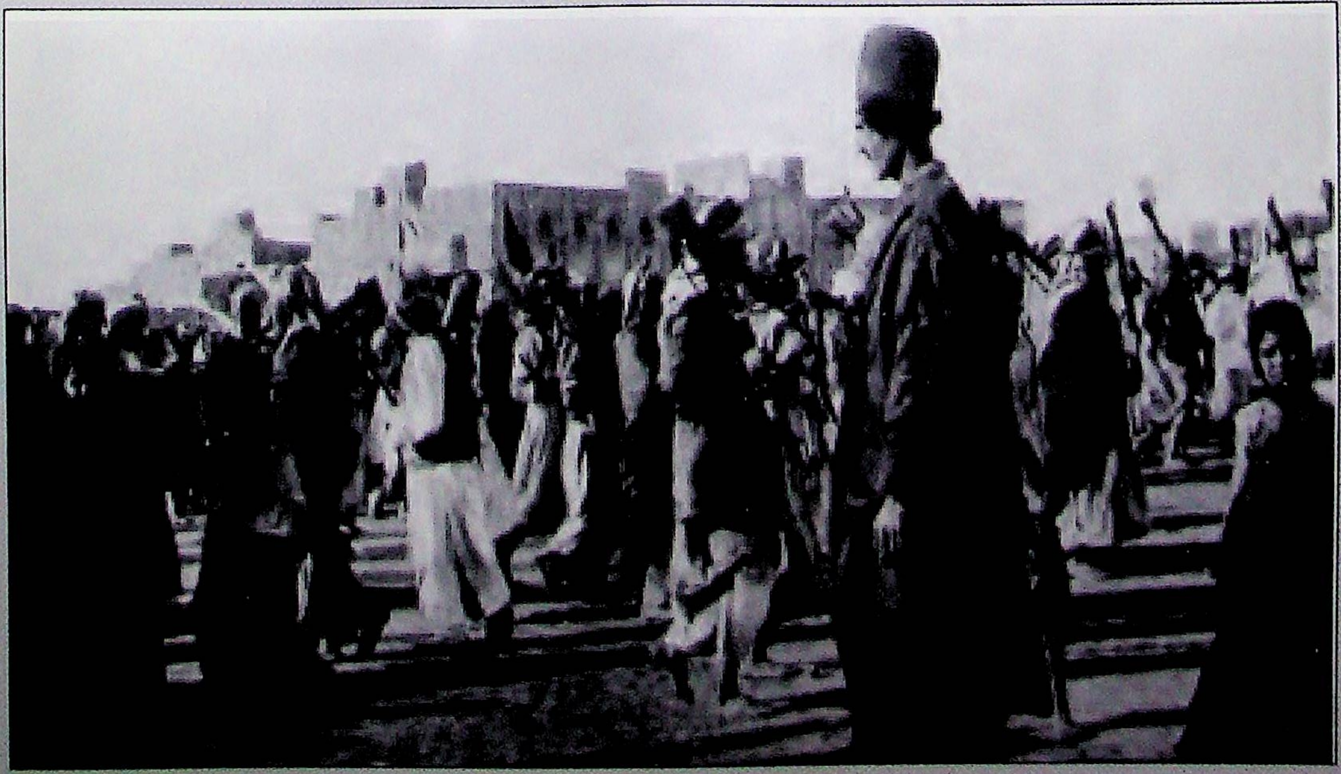


Photo: R. E. Shorter.

Besmakham Monastery, On The Road To Amarnath.



Arab Dance Ahwaz.

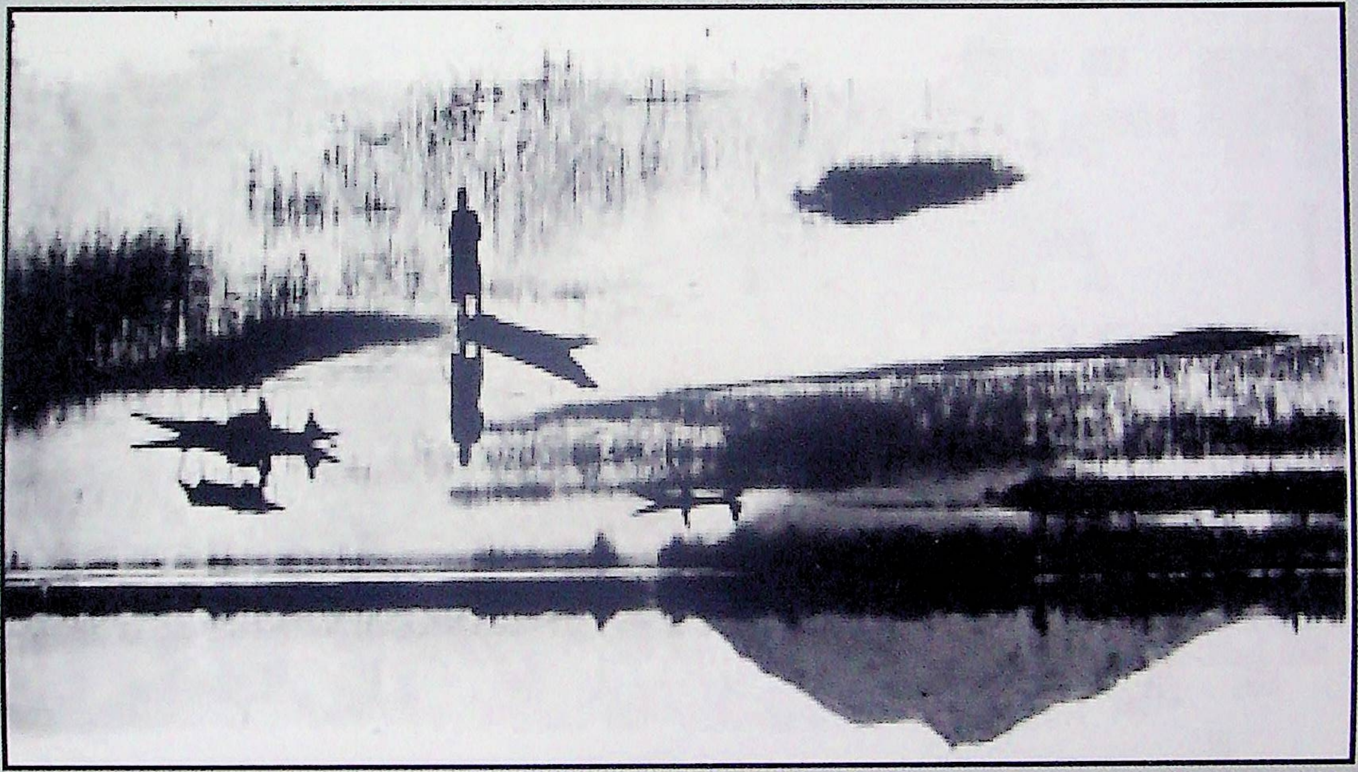


Photo: R. E. Shorter.

The Dal, From Nishat Bagh.

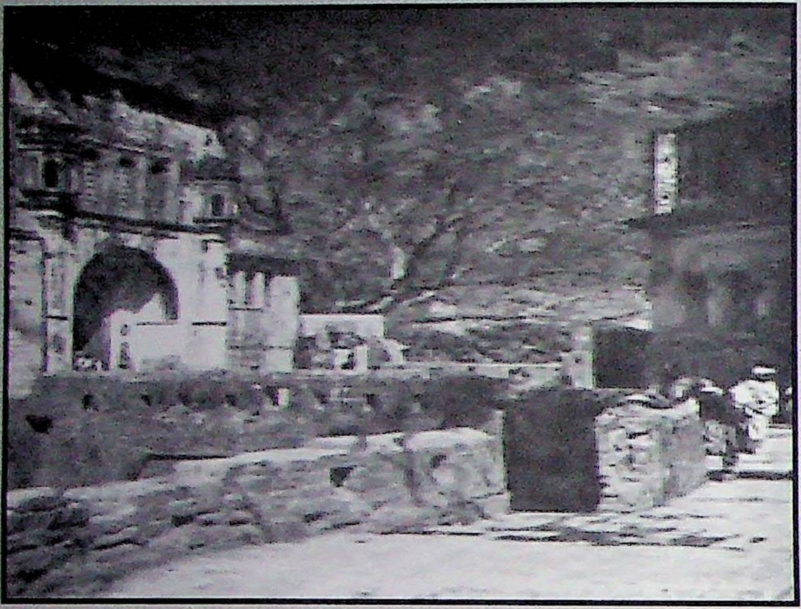


Photo H. L. Wright, Dharmsala

The Entrance To The Temple, Jawala Mukhi

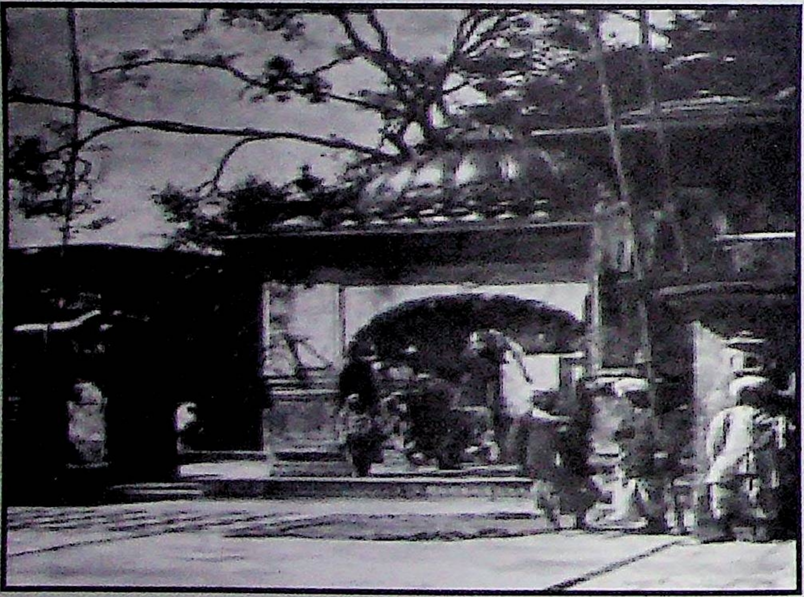


Photo H. L. Wright, Dharmsala

The Temple At Jawala Mukhi

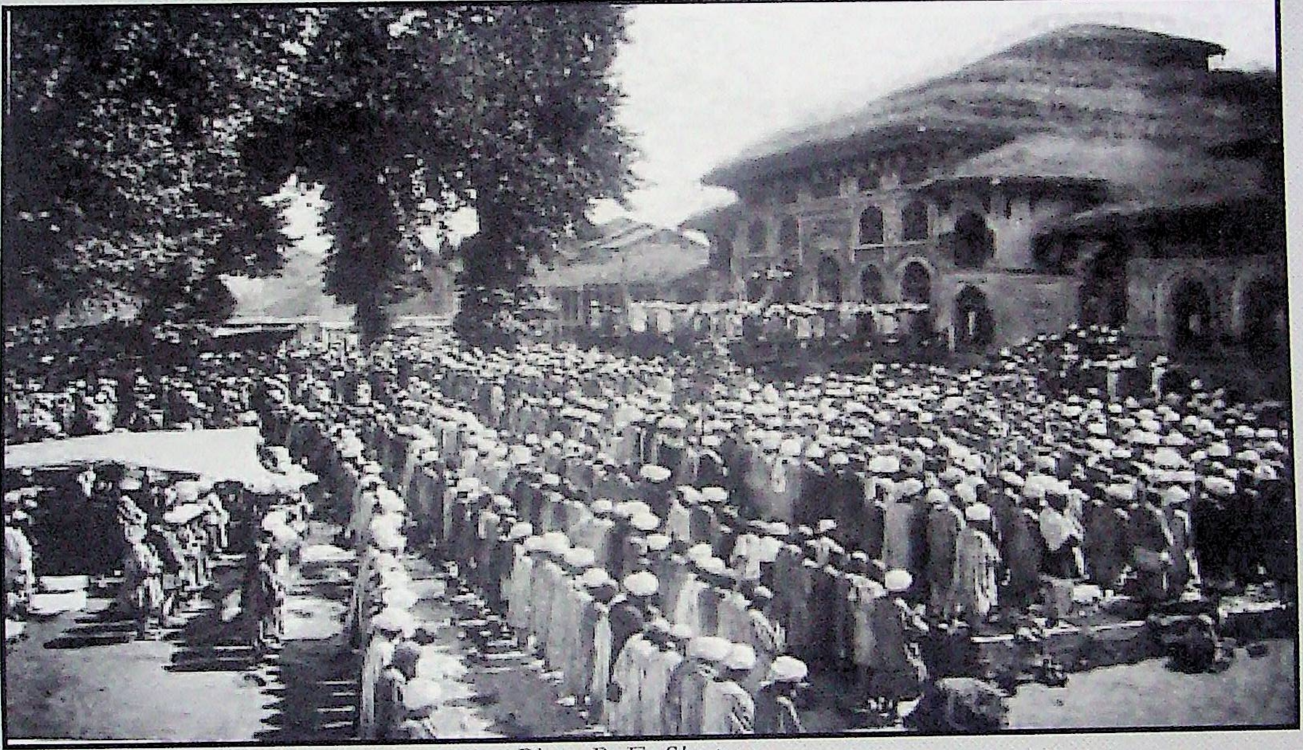


Photo: R. E. Shorter.

Muhammadans At Prayer. Hazrat Bal I.

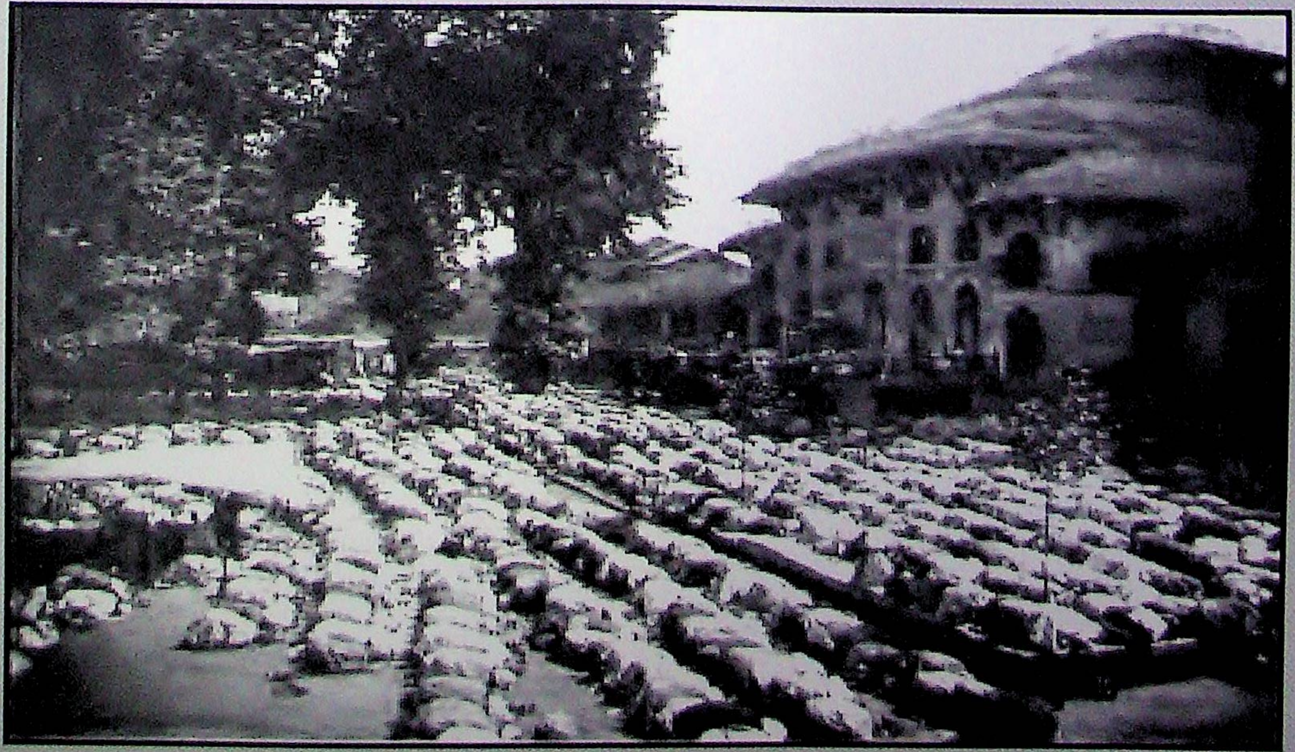


Photo: R. E. Shorter.

Muhammadans At Prayer. Hazrat Bal II.

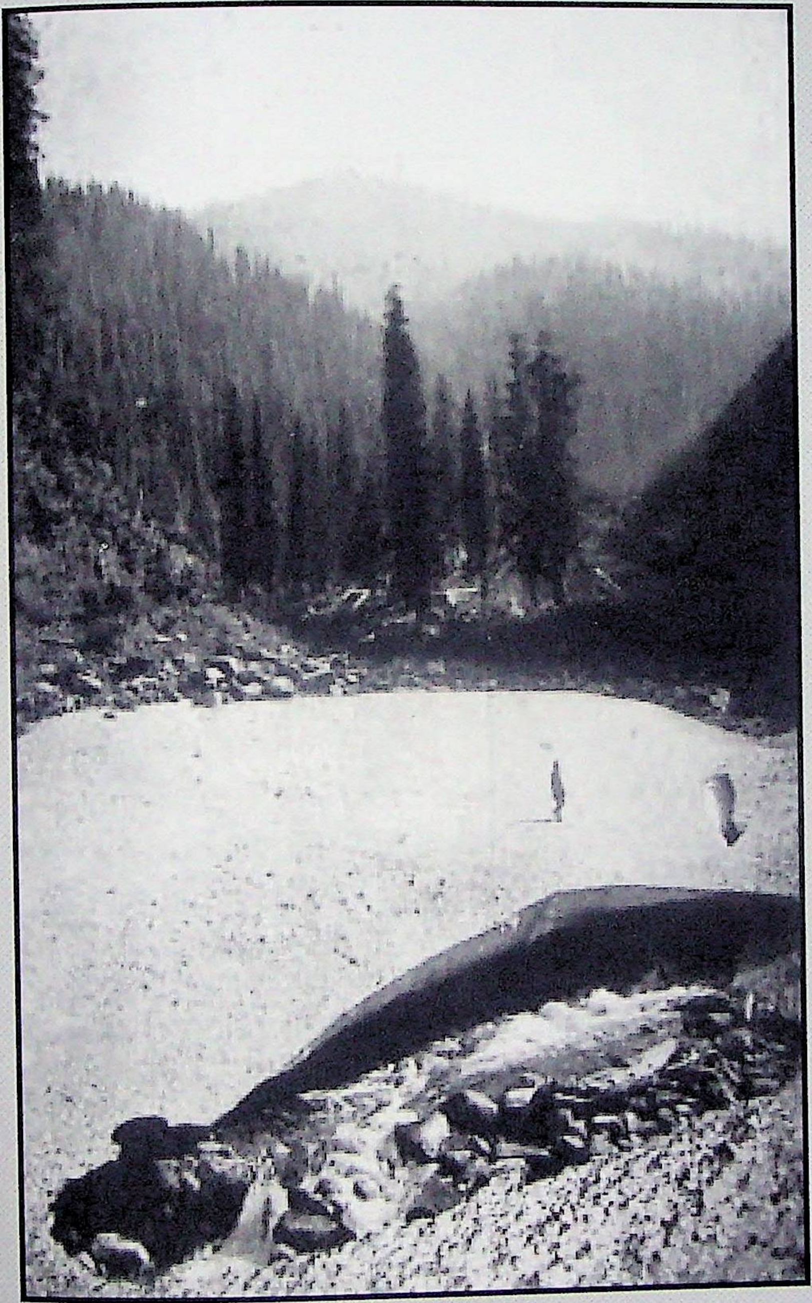
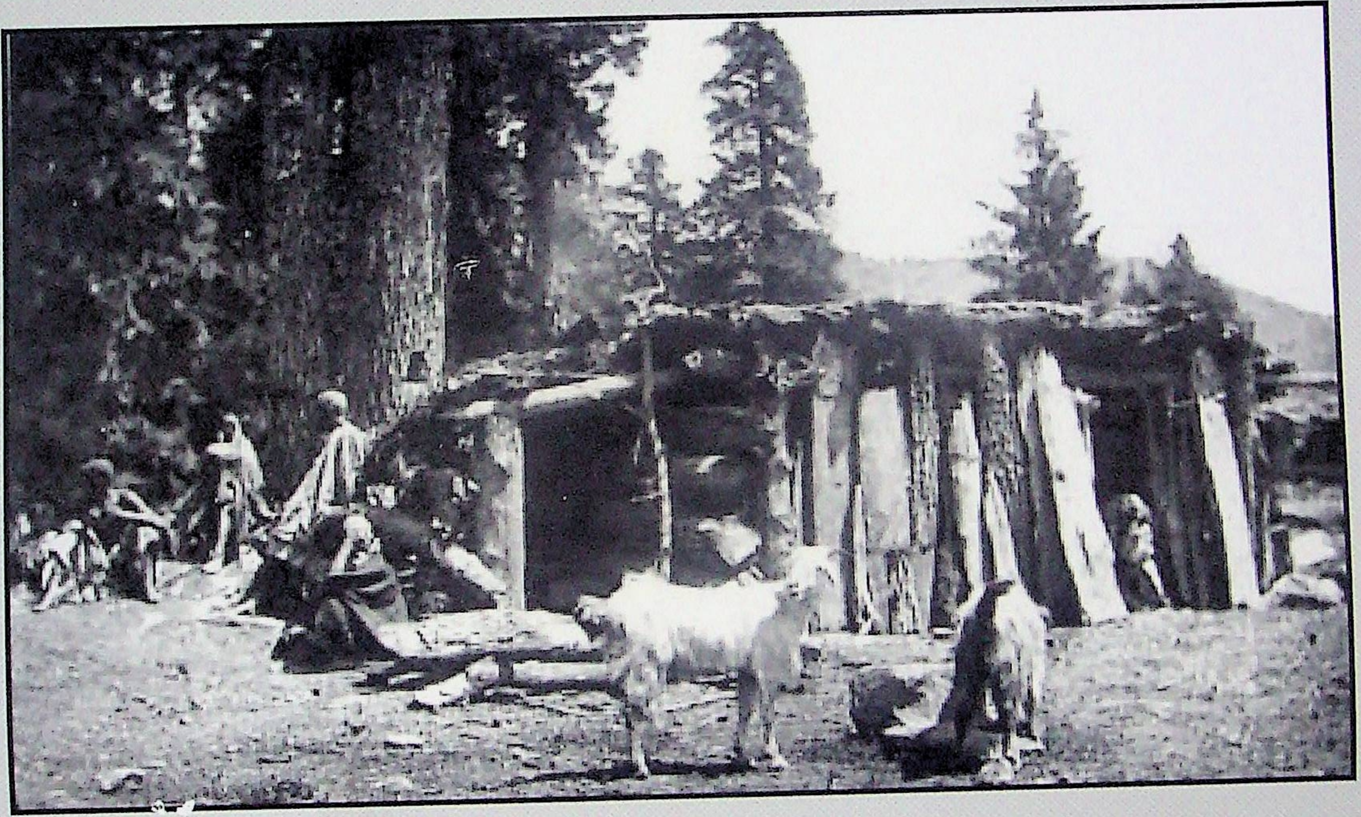


Photo: R. E. Shorter.

Snow Bridge In Kashmir.

Photo: R. E. Shorter.

A Village Group.

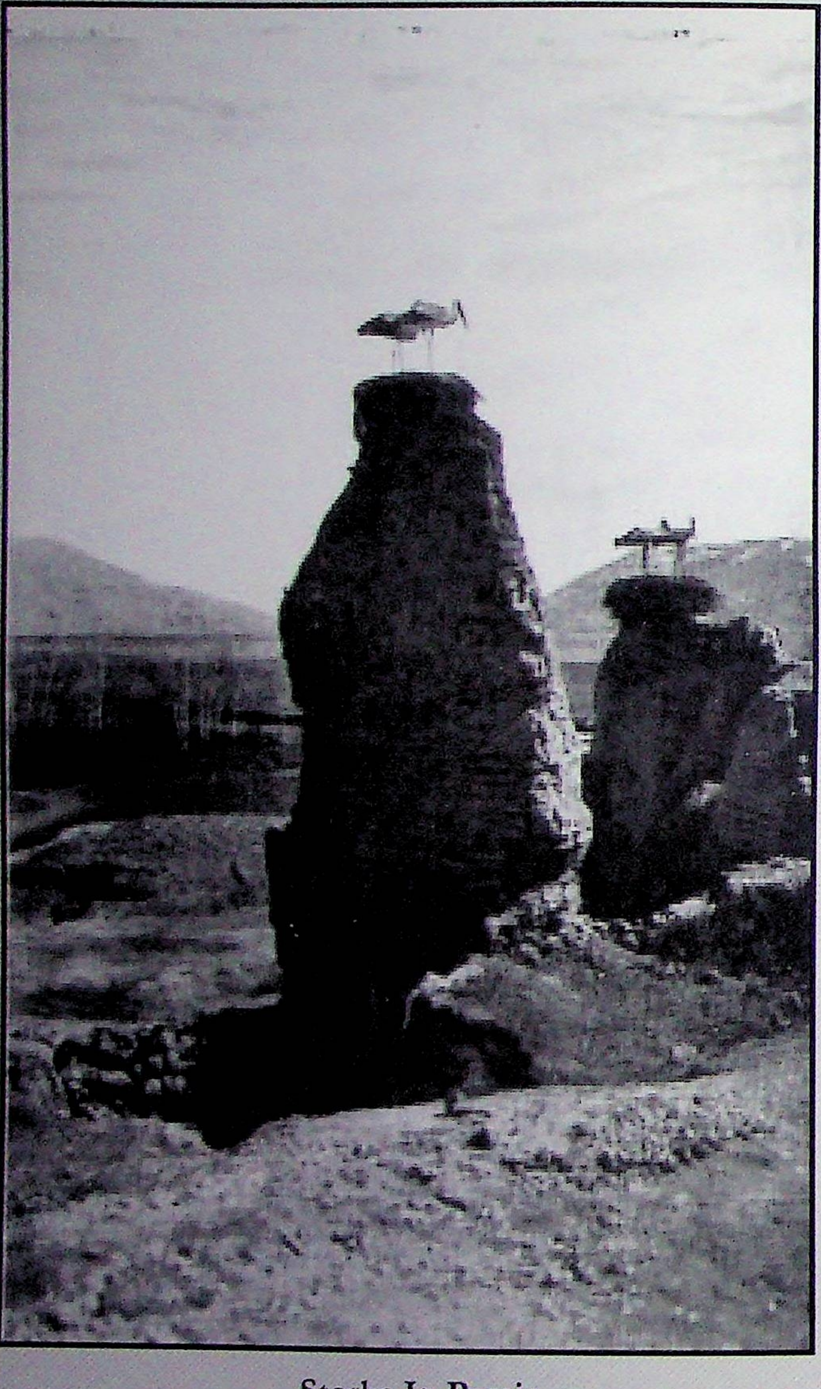


A Googar Hut.

Photo: R. E. Shorter.

A Maro Scene.

John Hampshire.

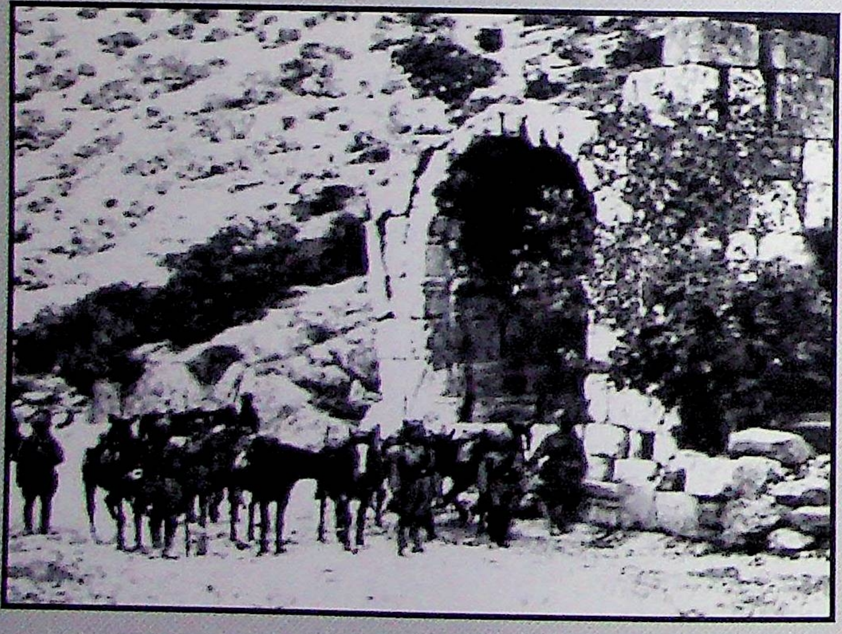


Storks In Persia.

Cossacks In The Snow.

Kurds On The March.

The Caravanserai, Bisotun.



The Taq.

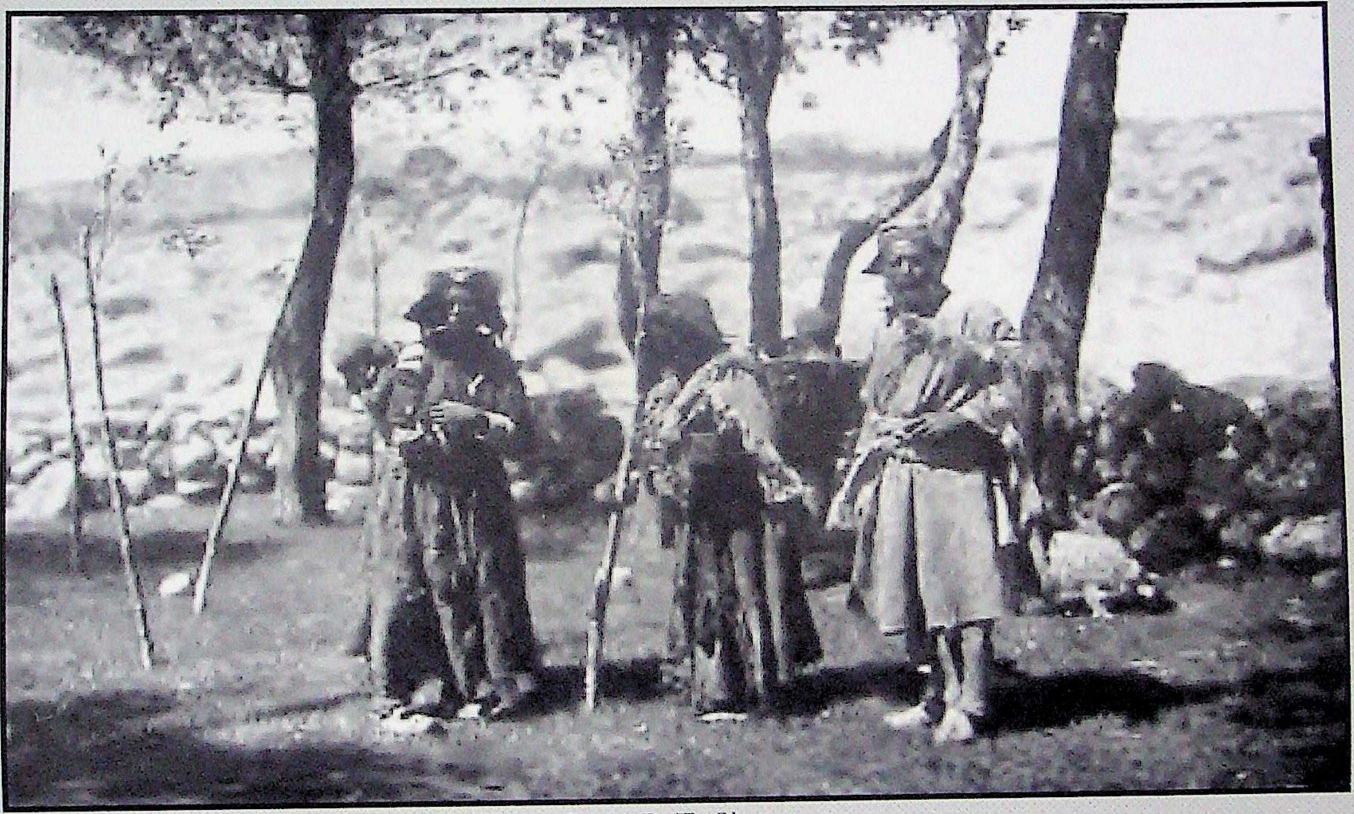


Photo: R. E. Shorter.

Ladakhis.

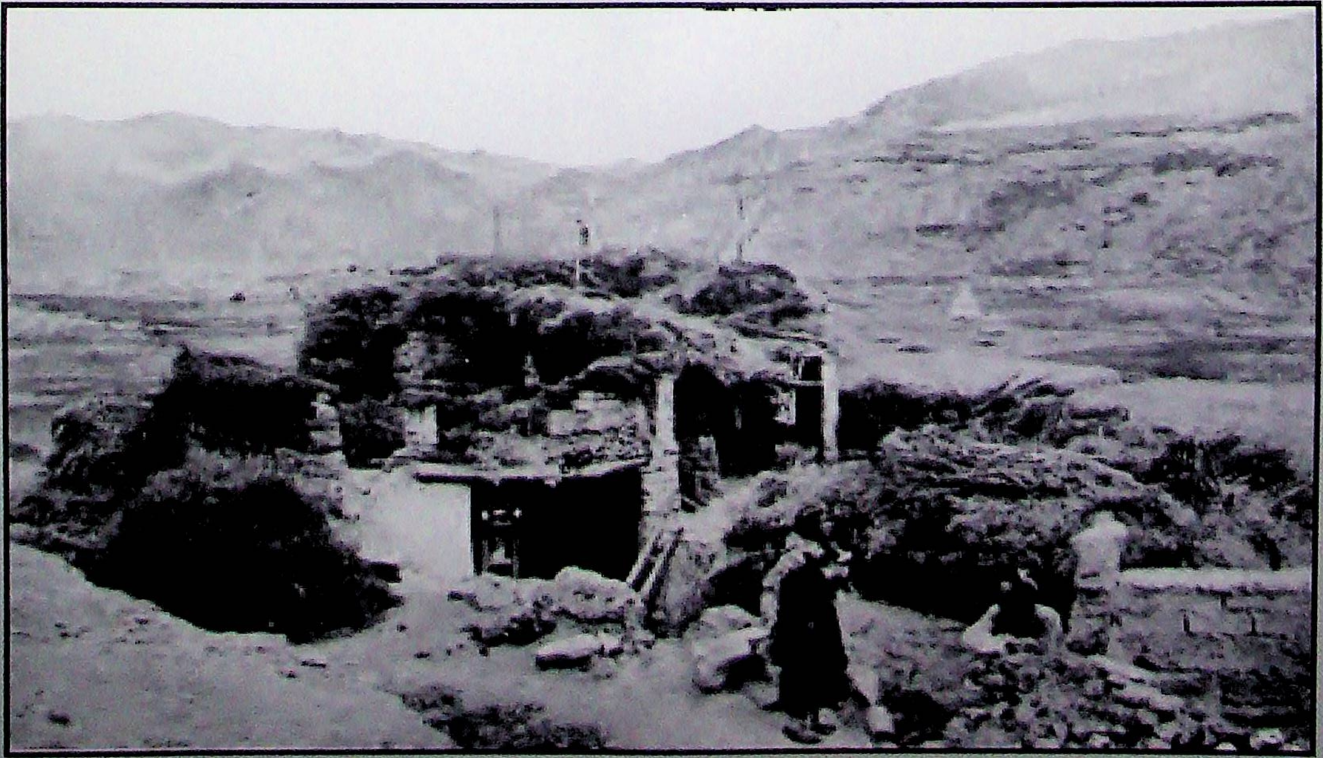


Photo: R. E. Shorter.

A Ladakhi Home.

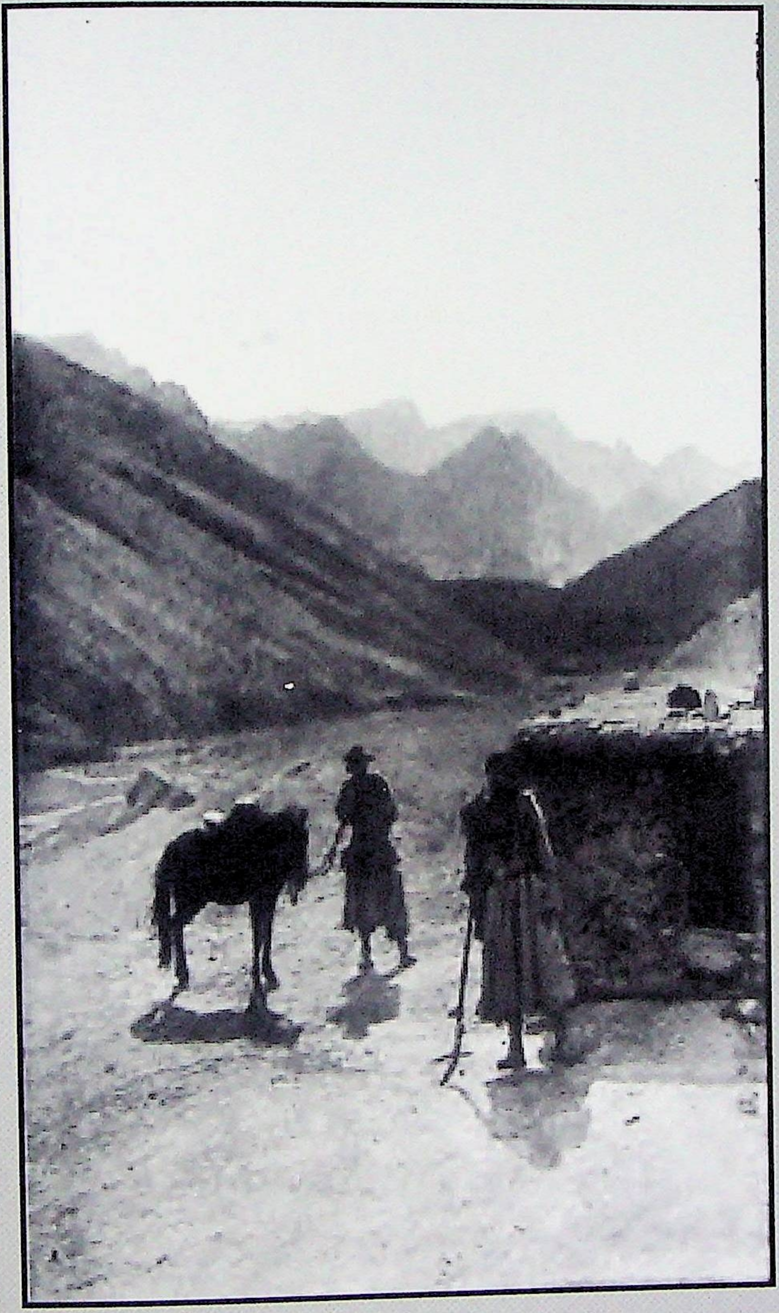


Photo: R. E. Shorter.

A Dak Runner's Shelter On The Ladakh Road.

Photo: R. E. Shorter.

Harvesting In Ladakh.

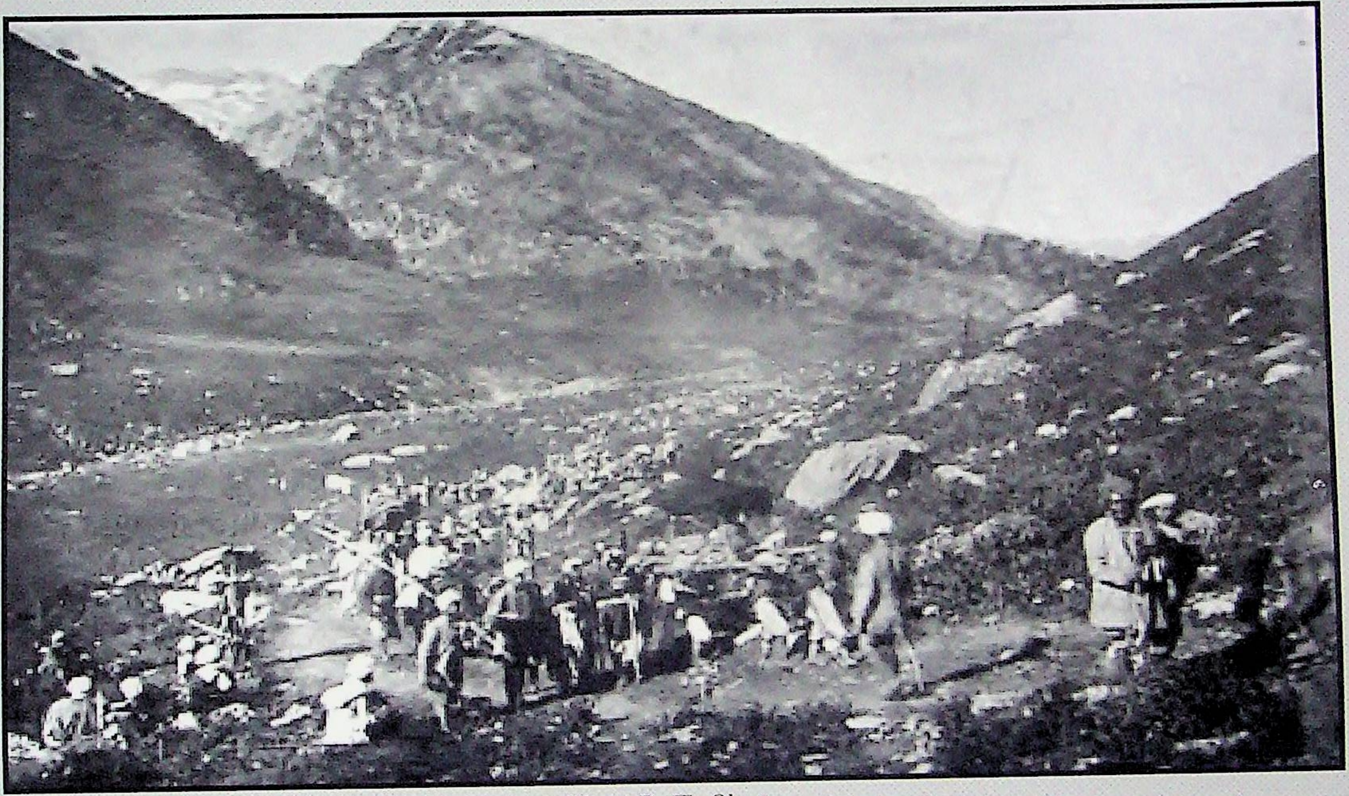


Photo: R. E. Shorter.

Pilgims to Amarnath Passing Zogpal.

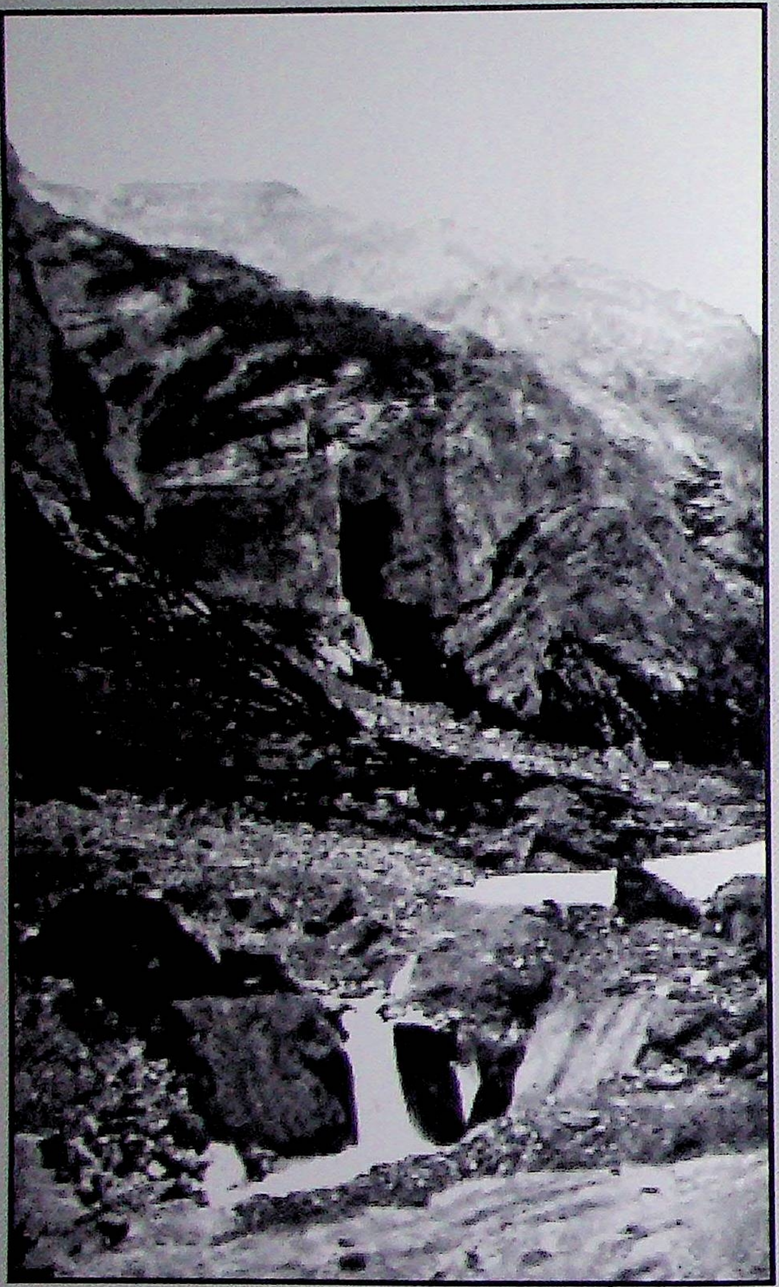


Photo: R. E. Shorter.

The Amarnath Cave.

Photo: R. E. Shorter.

Nanga ParbatFrom The Rupal Nullah.

Photo R. H. Shorter

The Lider River Above Pahlgam.

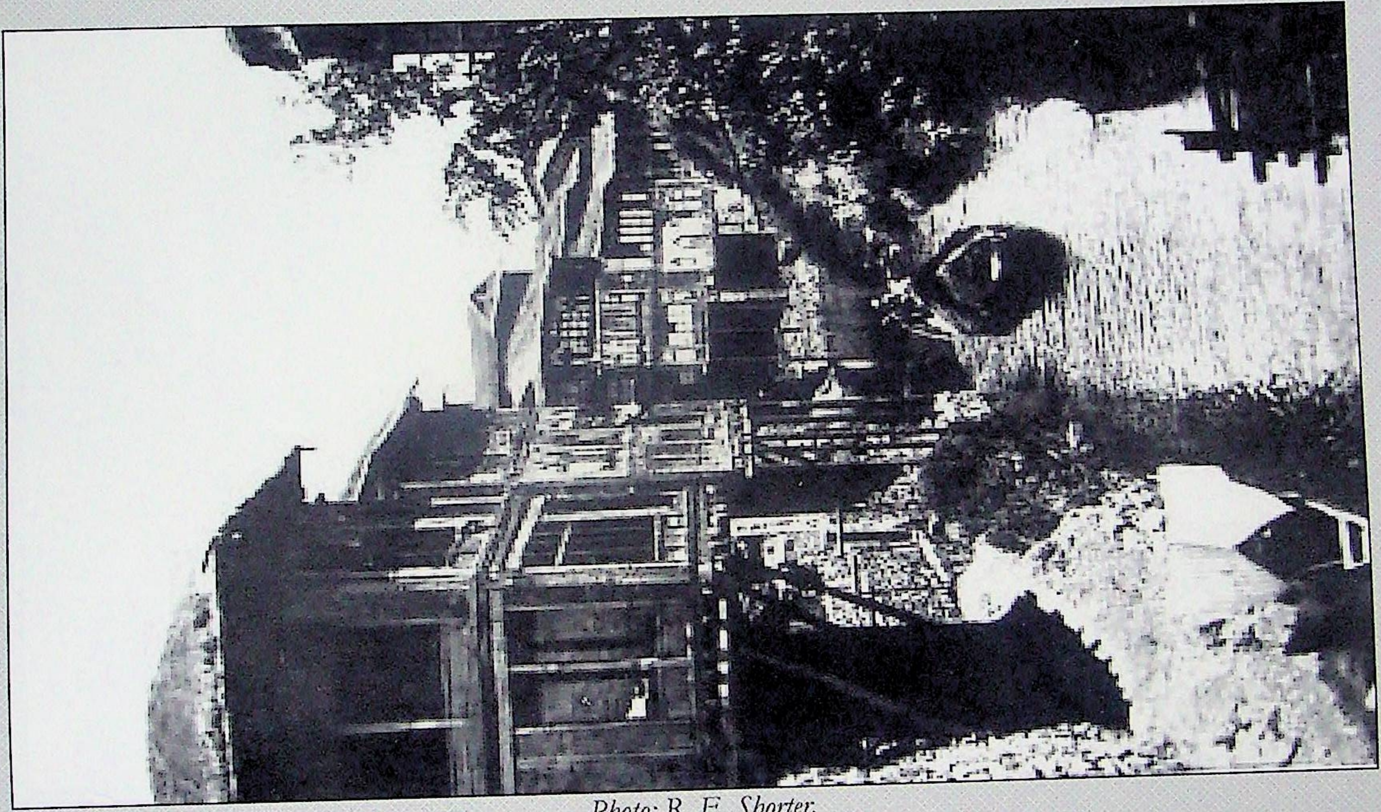


Photo: R. E. *Shorter.*

The Mar Canal.

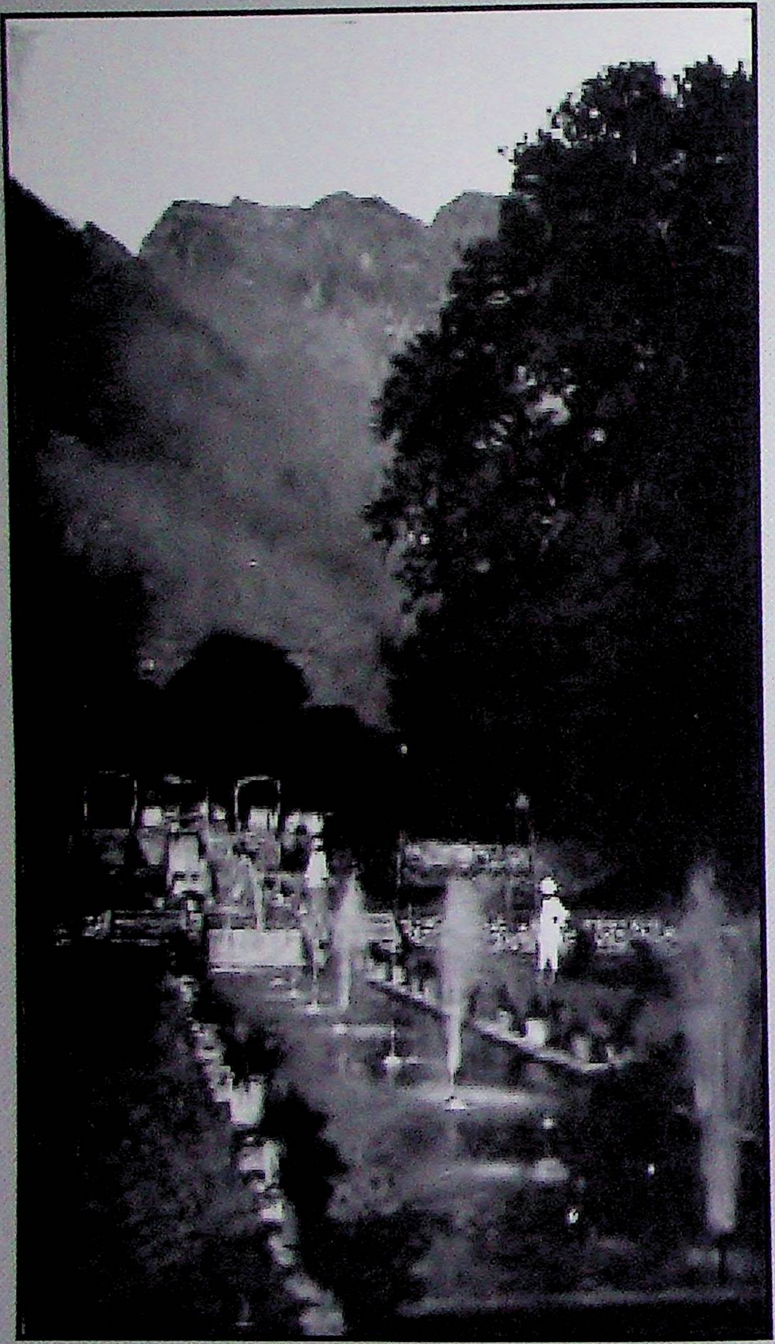


Photo: R. E. Shorter.

Nishat Bagh.

Rakiote Glacier And Peaks.

Lotuses On The Dal Lake.

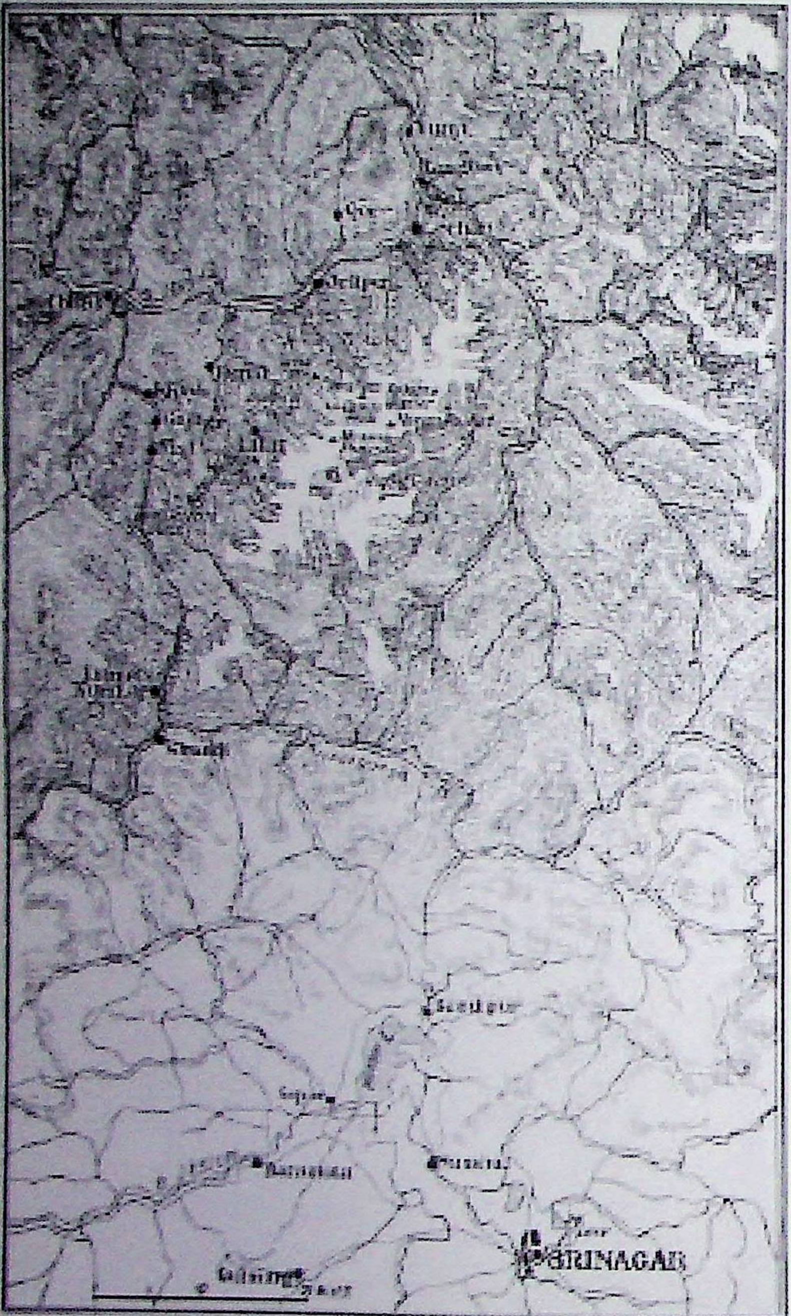
Photo: R. E. Shorter.

Bunar Village.

Views Of Diamirai Glacier.

Photo: R. E. *Shorter.*

The Sind Valley Below Sonamarg.



The Map Of Nanga Parbat District.

III

The Nishat Bagh is approached by the open lake. It is probably the most beautiful old garden in the East—seven wide green terraces of smooth-cut lawn, with bold hills behind and the lake in front. As in all these old Mughal gardens, a springfed conduit runs down the centre, dropping from terrace to terrace by a series of cascades into reservoirs in which fountains are playing. The Nishat is more park-like than the others; it is more directly under the crags and the lotuses grow almost up to the old lodge at the foot. The stone conduit is bordered by paths with flower-beds on each side, which are intersected by other paths as in old French gardens. The flowers are generally the highest and crudest that grow, but the beds of aster, zinnia, salvia, canna, which would be ugly and garish on an English lawn, are appropriate here; the warm massed colour is subdued in the open spaces under the shade of the great trees; it glows softly, like a crimson spot on a moth's wing. The lawns on each side are symmetrically planted with magnificent chinars, which date from Akbar's time. I wondered why this most artificial of gardens left no impression of artifice. The symmetry and formalism of it are on such a large scale and in such a large natural setting, that it has become part of the landscape; the hill and lake are brought in. Man has effaced himself in his work. A miniature garden here would have looked like a reclaimed patch, trivial and temporary, a vain meddling with nature and a perversion of her ends. As it is, the trim details at one's feet and the grandeur and distance blend as in the mellow canvas of an old master or as in the description of Eden in "Paradise Lost." The Nishat Bagh is an epic in gardens.

We spread our rugs and cushions under the largest and shadiest chinar and prepared ourselves for an idle day. How distant was any sense of discomfort now! Minerva, cool and reposeful in the shade, looked like a princess who had sauntered into the Trianon for a siesta under the trees. There was no spider or mosquito or earwig near to molest her. We had taken Vigne's travels and "Jocaste et le chat maigre," which we exchanged and discussed lazily. The title of the French book had always fascinated me. I wondered if the cat was thin because Jocaste was poor or unkind. Or perhaps it was only thin when it entered the story and grew fat afterwards.

I had pictured Jocaste working for it, a little grisette in a black dress with a V-shaped opening at the bosom, sitting in a bare unfurnished atelier with a canary in a cage, looking out into the Luxembourg Gardens. I was disappointed when I found that there were two tales and that there were no mysterious relations between the cat and the enigmatic lady and worse, that there was no real cat to drag its lean and hungry length through the story at all.

As Minerva fell asleep I took Vigne from her lap. He had walked and talked in the Shalimar and Nishat gardens only eighty years ago, yet he seems almost as old-world as the Mughals with whose shadows he peopled "the gay shining walks" of "this once royal garden." Out on the lake I could see the Isle of Chinars where he and Dr Henderson and Baron Hugel met in 1838 and agreed to put up a tablet in memory of their visit. They drafted the inscription and obtained leave from Ranjit Singh. The names of former travellers were to be inscribed: Bernier 1663, Forster 1786, Moorcroft, Trebeck and Guthrie 1823, Jacquemont, 1831, Wolff 1832. Vigne does not seem to have heard of Manucci. There were only eight, but the paper was not large enough. Either their own names or those of the previous travellers had to be written in small type. The dilemma was easily solved. "One of the party made us laugh by giving utterance to a sentiment which we could neither of us deny to be our own. Oh, damn 'the previous travellers'! Get in our names as large as you can." The tablet was raised, not without passive resistance, but even before Vigne left the valley he had doubts of its permanence. He suspected that Gulab Singh and Dhihan Singh would be jealous of "the substantial presence of European names in a country they intended to make themselves masters of upon Ranjit's decease." He feared—very justly as it proved—that the next of his countrymen who looked for it would find it gone. Should such be the case he hoped the traveller would replace it, "and if he have the *esprit de corps* of a traveller there is no occasion to give the reason." Delightful naiveté.

When Minerva had opened her eyes—"woken up" is too gross a term for that subtle transformation—and made the tea, we explored the garden before reluctantly taking ourselves off. It is an Eden, but an Eden with a serpent. At the upper end the stairway leading from one terrace to another passes through a passage open at the top to the sky. We had just come up and were standing near the coping, when Minerva, who was nearer than I, heard it arrive. She touched my arm and I saw a huge four-foot snake swishing up the stairs on its belly scales. It rested on the top steps and surveyed the garden with undulations of its horrid thin head. A harmless brute, but incompatible with the presence of Minerva. I stoned it into a hollow tree. Going down, Minerva walked behind me.

"There are always two," she said.

We push out into the open lake through a sea of lotuses. A few of the pinky-white flowers remain; the cup-like seed-pods are already purpling. We watch the terns, the grebes, the jacanas, the fish-eagles; the kingfisher dropping like a plumb-line from its crumpled lotus leaf, the dark-red dragon-flies, the happy fish burrowing lazily into the green underworld.

We are far out in the open water, when a sudden storm comes up the valley. A black vertical shaft of rain, with a furnace glare behind it, is deluging Baramula: it vanishes in grey mist and another falls nearer the lake. The light poplars bend and shiver in flurried agitation, each with its head strained towards the East as if it would escape. Rasula and the boatmen chatter in dismay and thresh the water with their paddles, too excited now for any rhythm. They leave their course and make for shore, the breeze following in little freshets as if gathering strength. Just as the nose of the boat rustles among the reeds a stillness falls on the lake. The storm has turned in its track and is ravaging Apharwat—which is now lost in darkness. But the sun has broken through the rim of cloud and the snow-peaks to the end of the valley turn from grey to rose. We enter a channel which we should not have discovered if it had not been for the storm. The lake is bathed in colour —the lotus leaves are lifted gently by the breeze, the vivid green of the underleaf catching the slanting light; there is a golden glow on the water-weed, beyond and behind it the dark green belt of the poplars and willows. Soon the last sigh and rustle of the wind dies away and in the stillness the fairy-haunted ruins of the Peri Mahal loom through the mysterious blue haze, calling us up into the darkening hills away from the lights of the city.

"Isn't it a spook of a ruin!" Minerva says.

IV

The next day we spent in the Shalimar Bagh. The garden does not fall in broad sweeps as does the Nishat, from the mountain to the lake. The hills recede from it and it is approached by a channel between willows almost a mile long. The chinars are not so grand, the terraces not so high; but it is the more old-world garden of the two. It is beautiful in another way. The Nishat does not belong so much to a period, its human associations are slighter; it is part of the landscape. The Shalimar is a seventeenth-century garden of the Kings of Delhi. One feels the Mughals there. I think the impression left by the Taj Mahal contributes subtly to the effect. For this was the scene of the romance of Jehangir and Nur Mahal. The architecture, too, though not strictly Mughal, helps—the painted lattices richly fretted, the roofs of cedar and old wooden tiles, the black marble pillars with their strangely ornamented capitols that branch out to support the eaves, the Saracenic arches, the cypresses by the reservoirs with the hundred fountains, the cascades of old limestone niched for the lights which gleam at night behind the falling water. And within the arcade the Persian frescoes on the wall and the stag-heads holding sconces, give the place a look of habitation.

The garden is probably in better repair than when Vigne saw it in 1888. Ranjit Singh's governors were vandals; they cut down the trees, whitewashed the black marble and were generally very indifferent inheritors of the cultured Mughal. Vigne, was received by Mian Singh in the Shalimar with great patronage. He found the Sikh sitting in state surrounded by his officers and wearing the gorgeous costume of his race, a single-threaded shawl turban and a Kashmirian heron's plume. It was a tedious entertainment. After a few meaningless and unintelligent questions he had to sit and watch the singing and dancing while the Governor slowly fuddled himself, with the strong spirit of the country. Vigne sketched while Mian Singh slept off the effects of the debauch. He describes how heartily tired he was of the nautch girls and how relieved when the "Colonel Sahib" called for his matchlock and proposed to shoot at a mark, though he was too fat to stand on his legs and too tipsy to hold his gun straight. "The Governor was so unsteady by the quantity of spirit he had taken that his matchlock could not compete with my double-barrel...!"

But it is with Jehangir and Nur Mahal that the Shalimar is associated. It is the garden where the "Imperial Selim" held the feast celebrated in "Lalla Rookh," at which the lovers became reconciled. I was delighted to find that Minerva thought all this pother was about a gentleman of the name of Rook, the prefix "Lala" having much the same significance in the Punjab as "Babu" in Bengal. When we got back to Srinagar we looked Moore up in a preface to his poems and found that he was given an unconditional three thousand guineas for the poem, however and wherever he liked to produce it. These were fat years for the poetaster. One can believe that this inane sugary stuff was lapped up by the middle classes as pure Hippocrene less than a century ago, but that it should have been commended by Jeffrey and taken seriously as poetry by the lions of the day seems an odd vagary of literary taste. Minerva suggested that we were setting up our own idols for posterity to play ninepins with. But where are they? We ourselves are chary of filling our niches. We have lost too many illusions. Hero-worship is as dead as bigotry. We have grown captious and old.

"When Day had hid his sultry flame
Behind the palms of Baramoule,
When maids began to lift their heads
Refresh'd from their embroidered beds."

Where are the palms? What insects haunt the embroidered beds. Let us hope the ladies of Baramula had a different kind of fragrance in Jehangir's day.

If there is one part of "Lalla Rookh" that we might have patience with now it would be the prose interludes in which the chamberlain Fadladeen threatens the poet with the Chabuk. But Longmans knew their public. The three thousand guineas was a good speculation. Seven large editions were sold out in the first year. Also the work was acclaimed as accurate in detail and colour. Travellers said that the descriptions were so exact that Moore had studied Oriental literature to such effect that to read him was like treading familiar ground. There was no need to visit Eastern scenes on the back of a camel when one could read Tommy Moore in one's arm-chair. Even Vigne commended the accuracy of "Lalla Rookh" and prophesied that a bust of the poet would be put up in the Isle of Chinars.

We visited the Isle of Chinars and found that one of the great trees had fallen, another was hollow like a cave, briars covered the debris of the old temple. Vigne's tablet had gone, even the clean-cut masonry coping, which stands out so clearly in his sketch, had mouldered away. No wonder the genius of the island rejected the bust of Moore.

We spent the last half of September in Srinagar and most of it on the lake and in the gardens, which are all five or six miles by water from the city. We lunched under the chinars and I would bathe afterwards from the shikara while Minerva read. We explored the Nagin Bagh, where the water is deeper and bluer than anywhere in the lake, under the feet of Hari Parbat; the Nasim, a spacious memorable grove worthy of the large mind of Akbar who planned it; the Chasma Shahi, watered by a bubbling spring on the hillside; the Peri Mahal, a ruined old monastery haunted by fairies and the Nishat Bagh and Shalimar Bagh many times—Imperial gardens in which I loafed imperially and Minerva tested all the moods of repose. Minerva thought the Shalimar Bagh more beautiful than the Nishat, until we visited the Nishat again and watched the sun set over the Dal. Far across the valley there was a storm in the Pir Panjal. A heavy purple rim of cloud threw the light aslant across the lake: the glow crept up the terraces and bathed the old stone in a flood of light. The great wall of rock behind the chinars took on a shade between terracotta and mauve. We could not leave the place till dark.

V

The mosquitoes died with September. It was now safe to turn *The Snark's* nose to the Wular, whence they had routed her. Mushtaq was still of our crew, hanging on, as we pretended to think, by a precarious tenure, though I knew Minerva could never bring herself to dismiss a hireling. She had seen him filling the butter-dish, with his fingers. The bearer, a down-country man, who thought a half-bred Kashimiri betrayable, over-heard the reproof and brought a story that he stirred the soup with an old shoe. This may have been a malicious fiction. A new lap in his service was marked by his bringing his "chits" to Minerva's writing-table. He laid them before her with a deprecating finality, as one who would say he was sorry that error could enter into the mind of the sahib or the mem-sahib, yet, however much the malice of circumstance might conspire to belie him, here was the written word in the face of which his cleanliness, honesty and efficiency could never afterwards be impugned. The insinuating stoop of the old humbug, as Minerva read the certificates and handed them to me, was enough in itself to save him. Subalterns on short leave had exercised their wit at his expense. "Mushtaq means; well." "Mushtaq has been with me for three months. He is leaving on account of ill health— my ill health." "Mushtaq styles himself a cook. He did me very well. I do not use the word in its literal sense. I lost weight at first on a contract. I then tried the *hissab* (daily account) and the Ananias in him had full play. The husband of Sapphira was a bad second. Afterwards I joined *bundobust* with another sahib and he wept bitterly when the commissariat was not entrusted to him. His distress was due to the apparent lack of faith on my part and he was not comforted when I pointed out to him that he would have less work for the same pay and that he would not be out of pocket as before. This, I think, shows zeal and energy on his part, which will no doubt commend him to visitors to this Happy Valley as likely to prove an excellent servant. He is of the manjhi stock and possesses all the useful traits which make his class prosperous." Weakly we decided to keep Mushtaq on until we were back in Srinagar.

The Wular cannot vie with the Dal in autumn, but in some ways Manasbal is more beautiful than either. If the word "romantic" still means anything, it describes the view across the lake from the north side. The garden on the west bank is now nothing more than an orchard and a village green. The tall poplars and the old ruined bastion jutting out into the blue wafer give it a southern Italian air. The wych elms and the fruit trees, plum and cherry, splashed with blood and gold; the balconied houses, their roofs supported on piles of brick, leaving the granary open, with the great earthen vessels, like wine-jars, exposed to the four winds of heaven; the vines and pumpkins growing up to the door, the strings of red chillies hanging from the eaves, made us think of an old Greek pastoral. Only the herdsmen are vacant and sad. They do not sing at their work of Demeter and the threshing-floor or of the shadowy plane tree or of the golden flower of the ivy or of honey and the lips and hair of maidens.

What puts one most in sympathy with the villagers is that every graveyard is a bed of irises. In the evening, coming back from Manasbal, we met a funeral. It was one of those fresh soft evenings when one is conscious of the air as of a gift. One is a guest of Le Grand Seigneur and wonders why one has not remembered it always. Flocks look warm and peaceful. Birds accept one naturally as they might a reed or a tree. The foal turns from his grass and trots confidently to his stall. One's relations with everything are quickened. There is a new significance in earth and cloud. We do not need "the little more" to stir us— the iris that has chosen to flower a second time, the kingfisher that will not budge as we pass by, the poplar that has put on a lemon robe before the season. Ordinary things affect us in a new way. We see two mongooses in a reed-bed, nose to nose, intent on something hidden and we think of the dry warmth of their coats as if we felt it under the hand and at the same time feel the coolth of the water about the cattle's legs as if we were wading out with them into the stream; and we want to sit in a hollow tree because it is hollow or under a sound one because it is sound. We stood on the wooden bridge at Sumbal and watched *The Snark* pass under. It was not an ordinary houseboat, but a friendly monster with a snout and tail, its wooden tiles like scales, making it appear a kindly dragon full of gifts. Religion must be the state of mind in which we always feel these kindlier and more intimate relations with things—no evening's mood bred of soft air and changing lights, but a faith deep as life in the eternal giving and receiving. We ought not to have been so depressed by a funeral, but the sight of the little procession coming over the bridge made us infinitely sad. The mourners were so few and their gait so perfunctory. Only one wept.

They bore a long wooden box with a double folding lid like a flour-bin, with short legs to rest on. It was a bier, not a coffin. The body would be left in the hole under the irises and the box would be carried home. The corpse was light: it must have been a woman or a child or a shrunken old man. The simplicity of the rite left a feeling of unmixed sadness, which the freshness of the air and the softness of the cloud increased. A bourgeois funeral is depressing and dismal; one is not so sad, because one is repelled by it. But the nakedness of this imparted one of those rare desolating glimpses into the proportion of things. We could not go back after seeing this piece of clay despatched to its hole in the iris bed and dismiss a servant. Mushtaq was safe. It even lent a spurious and illogical dignity to the man.

But I doubt if Minerva would ever have passed sentence. I remember there had been one Ibrahim, whose good intentions so far exceeded his achievement that she could not say in cold blood, "You must go." She could not endure the thought of seeing the small of his back disappear down the drive for the last time. When he had ministered to us for three years we were transferred. It was a longed-for migration; but Minerva's first remark when she heard the marching-orders was, "We can leave Ibrahim behind."

VI

From the Wular we returned to Srinagar and thence up to Islamabad in the eastern end of the valley, where the Jhelum ceases to be navigable only a few miles from the springs from which it rises. Here we were two days from the Banihal Pass, which was to be my route into the Punjab through Jammu. Minerva had three more weeks in the valley. *The Snark* made the voyage from Srinagar to Islamabad, fifty-four miles, in three and a half days. We moored the first night at Pampoor, a village famous for its bread and its saffron. Of the bread I have no happy memories. We laid in three and a half dozen cakes. I would have no time for bread-making on the road. Mushtaq was to stay with Minerva. She had subdued him with a touch more effective than the uses of adversity. Pampoor bread, we thought, is good tackle; but though hard and crisp, it can become as stale as other bread and it is associated in my mind with a purgatorial march which I think of now as the "after-Snark."

At Avantipur we nearly ran into the arms of the most adhesive bore in Asia. There is an old Kashmir temple here of 800AD. We were on the point of landing to see it when Minerva touched me on the arm and we saw a stiff erect figure emerge resolutely from a shikara and disappear above the bank in the direction of the ruins. The temple retained him till dusk. We did not see it. Rasula was quite injured when we would not see it. "All sahibs see the temple—it is a very good temple. All sahibs see it," he reiterated. But we were firm and clung to *The Snark*, which seemed all the more snug and comfortable for the peril outside. We drew the curtains and lit the fire and Minerva said, "It is so nice not having to be near him, that it almost makes up for his being in the world."

At Islamabad we had our fill of sight-seeing. All the lions are gathered at this end of the valley. Martand, the temple of the sun, more than made up for the loss of Avantipur. The ruins should be seen in the early morning or at sunset in spring or in late autumn. They are of a bluish-grey stone with a tinge of pink or mauve in it, which is subtly responsive to changing light and shade. We entered the old temple just as the sun was setting. It stands on a *karewa*, a broad flat ridge between two valleys, on either side of which a river appears and disappears among villages in poplar clumps and groves of walnut and willow. We watched the sunset from inside through the massive portico of the cella. In the foreground stands the lonely arch of what used to be the outer chapel, supporting its massive architrave. Through this we looked down on a highly irrigated plateau, where the fields of purple amaranth and the green and chocolate-coloured rice crops, mingled in an intricate design, stretch away to the yellow hills above Islamabad.

Vigne compares Martand with Persepolis and Palmyra. Though inferior in magnificence and extent, it deserves, he thought, to be ranked with these isolated ruins on account of its solitary and massive grandeur and in situation it is far superior to either. "It is built," he writes, "on a natural plateau at the foot of some of the noblest mountains in the world and beneath its ken lies what is undoubtedly the finest and most *prononcée* valley in the world." We probably saw it for the last time unspoilt. Rails and barbed wire were lying on the grass and there was a heap of ugly palings. Holes had already been dug in the earth to complete the sacrilege.

Bawan, the sacred spring in the Liddar valley below Martand, is spoilt by man. We did not linger there. A wooden finger-post pointing to the shrine from the road, with a touting inscription on it and the name of the priest in English, prepared us for the worst. Every lion in Kashmir has its obsequious attendant. Half a mile down the road, by the rock-cave of Bomtsu, is another notice-board in English, directing you to "ancient temple in cave of over 5,000 years," and an "English-speaking priest" who sits at the seat of custom. We did not enter. It would be pleasant to drop upon such a shrine in a retired forest nook and press one's small offering upon a deprecating man of God; but to be mulcted thus vulgarly, to become a kind of public lucky-bag in which any tout may dip, is enough to destroy one's generous impulse at the root. At Martand there is but one old man who will leave you, a little reproachfully, for eight annas. At Bawan we were pestered by touts. A priest followed us about with a book in his hand, in which visitors had testified how civilly he fed the fish. Spiritual robbers with the triple brand of Siva on their foreheads pressed round us, much too close to Minerva, crying out for *baksheesh.* The grain-sellers badgered us to buy their grain and *chapatties.* When we bought it and threw it to the holy carp, the surface of the spring became a wriggling mass of backs and fins and scales. From the fish I turned to the horde of mendicants and threw two small pieces of silver in the air and as they sprawled and scrambled and wrestled on one another's backs I said to Minerva, *"Machli ka mafik,"*—"Like the fish." At which some of them had the grace to smile and look ashamed.

These lion parasites will be found wherever there are lions and there is no getting away from them, from Baalbec to Angkor or Birs Nimrud. It is the tout that has earned the Kashmiri his bad name. Of the upper classes I know nothing and I have always had a liking for the villagers, whom I have found hardy, kindly, humorous and sufficiently honest. I know of many who have proved their courage. But man's devolution is in proportion to his temptation. The tourist industry is not good for man or beast; it has demoralised many a happy independent race. The Kashmiri specimen is a type that must evolve when a people who have been looted always find themselves at last by a turn of the wheel in a position to loot without the exercise of any manly quality.

The people of the valley have been rough-ridden for centuries. Still one cannot always live in a state of making allowances and the "townee" of Srinagar or the Pandit of Bawan will probably exhaust any tolerance the traveller has left. I did not mean to say a word against the folk of the country. The cairn of abuse is high enough, I thought. I will not throw another stone. If I have heaved my half-brick with the others, I have aimed it only at the begging priest, the parasite and tout.

The next day we jolted down grass lanes, between willows and English marsh-flowers, to Achibal, another pleasaunce of Jehangir and Nur Mahal. It has the same conduits and chinars and fruit trees and picturesque old "*Baradari*" of carved cedar wood and lattice work perched over a reservoir of clear water. The fountain gushes out of a rock in the hillside beneath larch and fir and deodar. The leaves were already falling, the pears and quinces touched with gold, the cherry a splash of crimson. In its yellow autumn robes this little garden seemed more lovely than the Shalimar or Nishat or any other garden in Kashmir, but as the beauty of the valley increased every day with the change in the leaf and the new girdle of snow on the mountains, we were never faithful in our attachment to anyone.

VII

One afternoon—it was the day I had to leave the boat—Minerva was lying on the sofa with "Thais" in her hand watching the kettle boil for our last tea. We were talking of light things, when I saw a spider emerge on the cushion behind her, in leg-circumference as large as an afternoon tea-saucer. Minerva's perfect calm, her unconsciousness of what the Parcae were preparing, was beyond anything in Aeschylus or Euripides. She looked up and saw the dramatic irony of it in my face.

"What is it?" she said with a little gasp, raising herself on one elbow.

The spider moved, I sprang at it and crushed it—lightly and not squashingly—with a roll of manuscript in my hand. Its fiery particle was snuffed out by an article. I ran aft with the debris and spilt it in the water. I know how Minerva's eyes followed me with incredulous wonder. She cannot accustom herself to the thought of a frontal attack on a spider; she would never be privy to such a revolting holocaust; but the unfair part of it is that I, her knight and protector, lose caste by them. If these rapid dramas could be enacted deliberately and in cold blood she would rather leave the enemy in possession and change her boat.

I jumped ashore and climbed the bank and called out a farewell to her, feeling that the breathlessness of the moment would make the getting off easier. My kit had gone on hours before. But she called me back.

"There are always two," she said darkly.

It was very late that night, after ten I think, when I reached my camp at Vernag. My bearer had limped in only just before me. He had not pitched my tent and I had to put up in a filthy hovel, a disused rest-house of sorts. I washed my face and hands in the sacred tank; the fish who swim towards a shadow thought I was food. I dined disagreeably; the bearer had brought the Pampoor bread which I had once unwisely commended. And in bed there was no sleep. The little enemy held manoeuvres in five divisions on my body all night. Two native gentlemen who slept in the next room, separated from mine by a thin partition, snored as if they would wake Beelzebub. I had time to think and my thoughts turned to the smoothness of life on *The Snark.*

"Minerva knows how to travel"—an interval of self-defence..."What Minerva does not know about travel is not worth knowing...."

Another struggle. I would have burnt all the manuscripts of Keats for a tin of Keating....

"And I imagined that I was initiating her...."

I lighted matches. "If I make a double march tomorrow I might pick up *The Snark* at Avantipur...."

It was only pride the next morning that kept my face towards the pass.

END NOTES:

1. Boatman.
2. God.

5

JAWALA MUKHI

I

Jawala Mukhi, the Goddess of the Flaming Mouth, dwells in the Kangra district among the Himalayan foothills. The modern pilgrim will change at Amritsar in the train going North and take the branch line to Pathankot. From here it is fifty-two miles by road to Kangra and two pious stages on to the Flame's Mouth. The district is a network of shrines. There are a hundred and twenty-six altars at which the pilgrims may gather merit, but the Spirit in the Flame is more potent than any. There is much virtue in original fire; thousands of hearths and altars are lighted from this parent flame. It is the Vedic Agni, maybe the identical fire-seed which Mataricvan, the Hindu Prometheus, brought from afar. Princes approach it with bare feet. Maharaja Narinder Singh of Patiala carried a silver lantern to Jawala Mukhi and lighted it at the flame. The lamp was borne behind him by a servant under a canopy; at night a cloth of gold was spread for it on the ground. The same light burns today in the temple of Rajeshwari at Patiala and there is an offshoot of it in the City Fort. The sanctity of the undying flame is no doubt as old as fire. The Roman vestal was scourged who neglected to tend it. The early Greek colonists sent to the prytaneum of the motherland for the light that was to burn unquenched on the altar of the new settlement.

At Jawala Mukhi the fire springs from a cleft in the rock. Such an exhalation would ensure its priestly guardians a competence in the most rationalistic country. To the Brahmin or more questionable Bhojki, it is in both senses of the word, a godsend. Fifty thousand pilgrims visit the place every autumn and there is a great festival in the spring. Every worshipper brings his offerings and the rich are mulcted as only these priests know how. I could not discover what became of all this wealth. Of luxury there is no sign and whatever charity there may be is dispensed by *sada-baratis*[1] from the private endowments which they distribute. The priests of the shrine are not Brahmins, but Bhojkis. Whatever it may mean, the name with its uncouth suggestiveness is well-found. They are a degenerate, motley crew, of obscure antecedents, hereditary leeches like the *pandas* of Benares and Muttra, who suck the pilgrims' blood. They eat flesh and drink spirits and are generally described as litigious, quarrelsome and profligate. But it is hard to believe that these sharks consume all the revenue of the shrine. There is treasure buried away somewhere or the mystery of the drain is insoluble. The sister shrine at Kangra—the idol there has been identified with the headless trunk of which the flaming mouth is revealed at Jawala Mukhi—was destroyed by the earthquake in 1905. The new temple has been over nine years in building, yet the *sikram* has risen only twenty feet. If any wealth has been hoarded it is not forthcoming; nor has the head come to the assistance of the trunk.

Kangra lies at the foot of the Dhaola Dhar. It is the one point in the long line of the Himalaya where the snows overhang the plains without any intercepting ridges. Beneath this range there is a wide sweep of almost tropical vegetation. The temple is built on a hill commanding it. The pilgrims in March look down through the creamy-white blossom of the bauhinia on to the green belt sparkling with streams and up the gaunt buttresses beyond over the ilex and rhododendron forest to a line of peaks as bold as one could wish.

The highest point of this great wall is 17,000 feet; the mean elevation some 15,000 feet; the temple at Kangra immediately below is only 2,500 feet. There is no view of the snows from the plains to equal this all along the line from the Khyber to Bhutan.

In the beauty of its site the temple may be compared with Martand in Kashmir. The view is if anything grander, but the old shrine is utterly demolished. After the earthquake in 1905 not one stone was left standing upon another. Only ruddy Hanuman, the embodiment of force, waves his triumphant club over the Dagonesque ruins, his gross half-inverted thigh bursting the striped loin-cloth. The fort on the other side of the ridge was toppled over at the same time. It is built on a steep bluff between two rivers "like the pupil of an eye," and connected with the outer world by a thin neck of rock: an impregnable-looking place and ancient as the hills. It yielded fabulous treasure to Mahmud of Ghazni in 1009 and according to legend defied Alexander and held Akbar in check ten years. All the country here looks like the work of masons. The landscape is architectural. The bold lines of the great snow wall have been borrowed and repeated in detail among the foothills. The very cliffs are designed and rectilinear, though of infinite complexity. A photograph from the riverbed would look like a draftsman's diagrammatic sketch. One thinks of this broken country afterwards in lines rather than contours, for the children of the soil have carried on the tradition. It is a land of masonry and steps and walls. There is a *chaboutra*[2] under every considerable tree. Every hillside is seamed with staircases and causeways from the cobbled alleys of the hamlet to the series of compact granite terraces, centuries old, sloping down at an easy gradient from Kangra to the valley.

One loses the snows when one turns south-east to Jawala-ji and I made the detour with some reluctance. All my inclinations were for the higher ranges, but long ago when I was curious about shrines I had made a sort of tacit vow that I would visit Jawala Mukhi. It was one of a series of temples I wished to see. I had seen the others. So I took the road, letting the ghost of a dead hobby ride a living instinct, as an old person sometimes drains the vitality of a youth. It was a form of weakness which seemed at the moment strength. Still, every road in these foothills seemed good. It was early April. The air was washed clean and fresh after two days downpour and the sky was a bright forget-me-not blue. The motor had come through to Kangra, fifty-two miles, without a hitch. There were masses of wild roses all the way and the scent drawn out by the sun after rain floated across the road.

I walked the twelve miles from Kangra to Rani Tal. The stage lies along the high road from Jullundur, nearly a hundred miles distant in the plains, to Dharmsala. The country is bare at first after one leaves the foot of Nagar-Kot and not very interesting. One meets files of dejected-looking camels bringing up oil into the hills. From Rani Tal the road to Jawala Mukhi branches off towards the valley of the Beas. Here one is in the heart of the shrines. In the evening I made a detour to the temple of Jamaila-nag where folk are taken to be cured of snake-bite. I found the place deserted. The shrine was part of a little farm and the family who tended it were still in the fields. It was one of three compact, oblong buildings with mud walls, almost windowless and slate roofs. The house, the barn and the temple would have been indistinguishable if the door of the temple had not been open. Inside there was an altar without an image, scrupulously swept, overhung by a canopy which was supported by delicate pillars of black marble. On the plinth were scattered the usual bunches of peacock feathers, bells and conch shells; and the marble sink at the foot was filled with fresh roses. It was a well-to-do, prosperous-looking homestead, having the appearance and thoroughness which is characteristic of this valley with its slate and masonry. The farm, no doubt, contributes more than the temple. Possibly the revenue of the latter depends on precautionary doles proffered by way of insurance as in the case of Sitla, the smallpox goddess. It is not likely that the shrine derives much income from snake-bite cures; but its prestige, once established, could not easily be diminished. It would be difficult to prove the goddess impotent, for the snake cannot be very deadly if the patient who is bitten survives long enough to be taken to the shrine. Also I have a suspicion that Jamaila-nag is not often subjected to the vulgar test of efficiency. There are other *nag* temples in the district and I tried to discover the fabulous *zaharmora* or serpent stone, which according to superstition is derived from the saliva of a markhor that has eaten a snake. But I could hear nothing of it. I was told that the priest makes the patient drink water in which the idol has been washed and eat the sacred earth of the place and rub it on the bite.

II

The next morning when I took the road I met the last stragglers of the pilgrims returning from Jawala Mukhi. One of them asked me for fire and showed me his pilgrim's staff. It was an iron trident, which he placed under his right arm for a rest when he slept. He was proud of its multiple uses and showed me how it was hollow and how the two sides could be detached. It had stops like a flute and made weird music; it opened out into tongs for coal; he could use it as a spade to dig his *gite* by the wayside; and I have no doubt that if feloniously inclined he could deal one an almighty thwack over the head with it. Deep set in his left arm was the copper badge of Badrinath—Badrinarain he called it—and the newly-won badge of Jawala Mukhi, a bangle of brass with two tiger heads meeting.

A Bairagi with loose hanging locks and a look of studied wildness came up and stood by us as we were talking. He was wearing the necklace of golden flies, emblem of the shrine of Kali at Hingalaj in Baluchistan. I had looked for it among the pilgrims at Amarnath and elsewhere and never seen it before. It was a thin necklace of beads and coins and small brass rings, among which were strung a few double tooth-like stones of a yellowish tint in a silver setting. These were the *sonar-ke-mukhi*, the golden flies; but if they were ever golden they had become dulled and bore no resemblance to insects at all.

The Sadhu is proud of his badges of pilgrimage, emblems which impress the stay-at-home Hindu as witness of his piety. In the same way our own wandering friars used to wear the shell from Compostella sewn on the breast or cap—in Hindustan it is the conch shell of Ramesvaram—the ampulla of Canterbury, the head of St John the Baptist from Amiens, the Virgin of Rocamadour, all the "syngys and brochis" which fed the satire of Erasmus in his account of the pilgrimage to Our Lady of Walsingham.[3]

I had soon met all the old familiar types. Some were trudging along perfunctorily and did not even greet me with their eyes. One man; was sitting under a tree, stiff as a stake, lost in abstraction; the next passed the time of day and asked me where I was going. Then I came upon a group who were still sitting by their wood fire like egrets round a tank, neck and shoulder sunk in meditation or more likely in a drowsy torpor induced by *bhang* or *charas*. They did not impress me as visionaries or world-weary or disillusioned men or as quietists or fanatics or adventurers, but as men who had solved the difficulty of living for both worlds in the easiest way. They owe no tie or obligation; they are responsible to no man, they do no work and they are honoured and fed; they indulge an inclination and by the mere indulgence of it their peace of mind is assured, for they are laying up treasure in the particular nook which they are to inhabit in the next phase of flesh or spirit wherever that may be. It is a comforting belief and I have often envied them their easy, careless vagabondage.

It was palpably a pilgrims' road. Every furlong there was the sign of some new witness-bearing—sacred, wells with deep flagged steps leading down into the bowels of the earth; upright stones cut smooth at the top with footprints on them all pointing to the way; a walled shrine built high up into the fissure of a tree in which some Sadhu had lived erect, basking in the reverence of the faithful and fitting the crevice like the gymnosophist in the "Tentation de Saint Antoine"; a cage of green boughs cunningly twisted, the lodging of some holy man in the night; the lingam and the yoni under the pipal tree; rude figures carved in the rock.

The road dips and bends and is full of surprises. One can never see far ahead. It is the kind of path that might prepare one for the approach to the supernatural. Now it enters a long dark mango grove, a thick wall of shade broken only in one spot where a single bauhinia tree thrusts a spray of exquisite blossom into the sunlit space. From this dark tunnel it bursts into open cornfields hedged with cactus and then drops down a deep cliff into a valley by a rocky water-course overgrown with wild oleander, past little thatched water mills waiting forlornly for the rains. Then for a mile or two the earth is one rock which heaves a rib up here and there flayed of its thin, dry turf or offers an unexpected socket which yields its sparse crop. Then a village and a pomegranate garden, dear to Proserpine, with a splash of roses and marigolds, grown to decorate some shrine. And then in the grove beyond, more feet, troops of them, all pointing to the shrine, little brown, clean-cut stones like a fairy's grave-yard and on every one of them a pair of feet, all hurrying one way. I imagined them the foot-prints of pilgrims who had died on the road, left in pious record by their friends;

but I was told they were *charas-patra*, the feet of the goddess herself.

At a bend in the road I heard pilgrims singing. They were girls in pink, holding hands; they were unveiled or half-veiled and they did not stop as I passed, but went on singing happily. Neither did they veil. It was holiday time in Kangra and pink was the mode. A mile beyond I made friends with a family while helping to disperse a troop of monkeys by the roadside who were cursing and spitting obscenely at a small girl who had thrown a stone at them.

The old trodden road with its marks of witness-bearing, its unexpected dips and changes, light and shade, desert and sown, always promising something new, prepares one if not for miracles at least for the monkey-ridden warren of shrines and cells in the red bay of the hillside which is *Jawala Mukhi*.

It is a good approach to an oracle; the priests at Delphi or Dodona could not have bettered it and the springs and subterranean fire giving it, as Baedeker would say, "every conceivable natural advantage," might have aroused the envy of Zeus or Apollo. Such must have been the pilgrims' way to the shrine that stood beneath the Phaedriades, the shining cliffs of Delphi under Parnassus; and such the flat-roofed cells that climbed the steep of Tomarus at Dodona amidst the oaks and rills, where the auspices were delivered through the moaning of the doves, the rustling of the wind in the trees and the murmur of the fountains.

Yet there is no record of a Pythian at Jawala Mukhi. The inspired voice, if ever it breathed mysterious omens, is silent.

"The oracles are dumm;
No voice or hideous humm
Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving;
Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine
With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving;
No nightly trance or breathed spell
Inspires the pale-eyed priest from his prophetic cell."

Jawala Mukhi is rather a shrine of propitiation. Kings in their need have sent to it from ancient times. When Vigne was there in 1887 Ranjit Singh, "Out of health and being rendered much worse by being checkmated in his designs upon Kabul by the expedition under Sir John Kean and wishing for the assistance of the spirit in such an emergency," had sent Radha Kishen, a pundit, to offer up prayers for him at the shrine with a sum of fifteen thousand rupees for the purchase of *ghi* to be consumed by the sacred flame. "The stench was similar to that of a candle-maker's shop." After Vigne's visit two silver-plated folding doors of exquisite design were given by Kharak Singh, the Maharaja's son. The massive bell outside the portico was the gift of a Maharaja of Nepal.

The shrine is built over the fissure. There is no idol. The flame issues from the mouth of the goddess whose headless trunk is or was until the earthquake swallowed it up, at Kangra. The main jet springs from a marble sink in the floor, round which the pilgrims make their circuit. There are lesser jets in the wall, dim, flickering flames, no doubt fed with *ghi*; and on the surface of some of the little pools in the rock above the temple gas is engendered. The Bhojki applied a match with a gesture that was meant to be impressive; the gas burst into a flame, flickering for a moment and went out. "In spite of the flame," he said, "the water is cold," and insisted on our putting it to the test. "Cold flame," he repeated, when we touched the water, as if he had assisted at a miracle. But his demand for special and particular *baksheesh* over and above the gift to the shrine detracted from our awe and the dignity of the supernatural. The needy mage is the sorriest of charlatans.

The miracle was performed for Vigne, only instead of the match made in Japan a torch was applied. No doubt the flame had been evoked, to the bewilderment of the pious, for the last thousand years. It was seen by Tom Coryat and Cunningham found what he believed to be an allusion to the cold springs and living flame in the account of the journey of a Chinese envoy who was deputed by the Emperor in AD 650 to travel through India in search of the philosopher's stone and the drug of immortality. The man of Han, disappointed in his pursuit of the elixir of life, returned with a story of two different kinds of water, one hot and another cold, which sprang from the midst of calcareous rocks in the kingdom of Pan-cho-fa (Punjab), where are elephants and men of stone to guard them. No one, so far as I know, has associated Jawala Mukhi with a reference older still, as old as time, a passage in the Rig Veda, where we are told that Brighu found fire burning in the water.

When the fire becomes dim the Bhojkis, like the Vestals of Rome, pour libations of oil into the pit. I only doubted the potency of the flame when one of its unsavoury guardians came up and protested that it was the breath of the Devi's spirit, that it came of itself or from God, which was the same thing; and that it needed no kind of sustenance at their hands. At Delphi they would have left one jet unlit and seated their epilept over the fissure, dimly distinguished on her tripod in the recess; and the woman would have shrilled forth her prophetic ravings out of the darkness as she inhaled the fumes. But there is no subtlety in these rogues; their mysticism is of the crudest. Nevertheless they cannot dim the bright hope of the faithful or cast a shadow between them and the divinity.

III

I looked for a sign and found it in the post office, a humble modern shanty built beside the immemorial flags leading up to the temple. The babu, who looked timid and sickly, was sitting among a heap of parcels, consecrated sweets, he told me, evidently all posted by the same hand. I found the strength of the little man lay in his wish to believe. He had been working as an assistant in the post office at Hoshiarpur when the conviction came to him that he or his wife was going to die before the next moon. He took out his yellow moth-eaten horoscope and showed me the catastrophe written there. So he had come to Jawala Mukhi and ''prayed" the Durga Devi that he might be transferred there or to Jullundar Peth or to Bhaijnath or Kangra, all holy places and good to die in.

"Further, I request that Durga Devi kindly give me that post."

He was almost immediately transferred, but his wife died before she could join him. I drew the story from him by a little tentative scepticism and he told it me as an instance of the efficacy of prayer at the shrine. He did not seem to have scored it up against the Devi that she had allowed his wife to die on profane ground, opening and shutting the door of salvation in her face.

The next evidence I obtained was from a policeman. He told me how the deity had miraculously intervened only a month before on behalf of a wild man from Sirmur who had come to Jawala Mukhi to cut off his tongue in fulfillment of some vow. The constable who told me the story had arrested the devotee, but he had had to release him as the Devi restored the member so expeditiously that there was no evidence of mutilation. As he was being led away for committal the fanatic put out his tongue at his escort, who, though a Muhammadan and unbeliever, was almost converted on the spot. A new tip had grown in the night.

I learnt afterwards that this was no isolated case. The tip of the tongue is offered as a pledge at Kangra and Jawala Mukhi more readily than silver and gold, the more so as the goddess invariably gives it back. I believe the piece amputated is so small that there is nothing supernatural in the growth. One can understand how the sacrifice has become popular with these wonder-loving, witness-bearing folk. It is a fine frenzy, a dramatic selflessness that can be indulged with caution. It is a real dismemberment of the ego, yet without great hurt. A little blood and much virtue. No doubt the pilgrim feels that he is like the goddess Mahadeva who, beholding vice, mutilated herself and cast her members to the winds. The rite is a very ancient one. Abu Fazal in his *Ain-Akhbar*[4] describes how pilgrims came from great distances to Kangra, thereby attaining the accomplishment of their wishes. "It is most wonderful that in order to effect this they cut out their tongues, which grow again in the course of two or three days and sometimes in a few hours."

In Vigne's time the minions of the Devi at Kangra were busy making new noses. People came all the way from Persia to be fitted. The priests told him that it was all done by the favour of the goddess and that the operation could not be successful elsewhere. He encountered many who had undergone treatment, but he was not impressed with the skill of the surgeons, thinking that "the new nose was a sorry substitute for the old feature." With the modifications in the penal code when the Punjab fell into our hands the demand grew; less, as the appendage was no longer forfeit by law. Cunningham, writing in 1875, said that noses were still repaired at the temple, though the patients were fewer and came from farther afield. It seems that old conservative cities like Kabul and Khatmandu still supplied the trade. He describes how, the flesh of the new nose was obtained by cutting a piece from the forehead of the patient; this was sewn over the vacant spot and supported by rolls of cotton with quills inserted for breathing.

But mere features, noses and tongues, are very small beer. A less apparent manifestation of the deity, though one on which the prosperity of Jawala Mukhi and most other shrines must ultimately depend, is the removal of "the sterile curse." Pilgrims will go any distance for an heir. No craving is so universal or so often unsatisfied. Gold pours into the lap of the fecund goddess. The efficacy of the Flaming Spirit in giving seed to the barren is seldom contested. Vows are made and if the prayer is answered the family is involved in a farreaching nexus of obligation which is transmitted to their descendants. First the mother will bring a small umbrella-like canopy of gold or silver and lay it on the altar or a flag embroidered with gold thread. If the issue of the pilgrimage is a son he will be taken for his *bhaddan* or hair cutting ceremony, to the temple and his son in turn will follow suit until it becomes a family tradition. And, lest the pious should become indifferent, there is a travelling staff of priests who perambulate the country reminding families of their ancient obligations to the shrine. A month before the fair a Bhojki will arrive at the house of some lax client hundreds of miles away, in the Central Provinces perhaps or Orissa and will open his long, greasy *behi* or ledger, in which he will discover the signature of the man's grand-father or paternal granduncle with evidence of pledges given by an improvidently ecstatic ancestor to a forbear of the Bhojki himself. The husbandman will curse his luck when he sees the priest's shadow at the door. He will urge in excuse the claims of his family *purohit*, whereupon the Bhojki will insinuate the displeasure of the goddess. Has not the husbandman been troubled with inflammation in one eye? It is possible that total blindness may set in within a month. That small boil at the back of the neck has in it the seeds of a carbuncle which may carry death. It is better to keep one's pledges. The Devi is strict and jealous in these matters. There was Shanti Sarup of– –But before the Bhojki has finished his tale of Shanti Sarup the unhappy man who feels his eyes dim and a prick of flame in his neck already, will have pledged himself and his family to seven distinct pilgrimages to the shrine with full dues to his ghostly intercessor. But the Bhojki's progress is not so easy as it was. Many of the families of his old clients have become tainted with scepticism and irreligious pride. A bunniah told me that he showed one of these itinerant priests the door, when the man who had been big with threats began to beg "even for one small copper coin." The bunniah retorted, "You appear to be in a miserable condition. If the goddess is indifferent to her own servants how should she busy herself with the affairs of a stranger like me?"

I was glad to escape up the hill away from these men. The path led up through arches, past innumerable shrines, under pipals and tamarinds and mango trees, all beniched and beflagged with monstrous images lurking in the roots, splashes of red and daubs of black. They have a kind of pitch in Jawala Mukhi with which they smear their idols and the effect is almost Polynesian. The idol in the temple of Krishna was a caricature of that gallant god, in a dirty yellow robe playing a flute, his face black as a nigger with white eyes and teeth. Radha by his side was equally black and dirty in her red shift. At the top of all things in the shrine of Arjun Nanga, the naked Arjun of the Bhagavad Gita, who surveys the broad valley of the Beas of which the stream is just visible under the hill to the west. He, too, is black as ink, the gross embodiment of a pure ideal. A goat was standing on end licking the rancid *ghi* that had been poured over his haunches. I have seen many holy places but none that have filled me with such disgust as Jawala Mukhi. Here the lingam seemed to me doubly obscene; the hideous drip on the greasy black stone from the *chatti* suspended over it exuded the spirit of the place. I was filled with a desire to escape, a kind of irritable impatience with the gods and I vowed that I would never go out of my way to see a Hindu shrine again. The truth is the goddess had me by the throat. Conscious of my antipathy she was breathing out a poisonous exhalation of which I literally sickened. Every image in its niche emitted its ray of malevolence as I passed by. Soon I found myself among the Bhojkis again in the lower courtyard. I saw a woman with a baby under her arm fall flat on the flags before the Holy of Holies. The infant tumbled on one side howling; her husband brought a dab of the moist red *rola* and smeared it on the marble steps by her side. She dipped her fingers in it and made the *tika* mark on her forehead. Then she drifted ecstatically into the shrine and circumambulated the flame.

I descended the steps into the street and passed the cowrie shop and the shop where they sell the badges of pilgrimage which I had seen the pilgrims wearing far away in Amarnath and Benares. I passed the post office where the orthodox little babu whom the Devi had helped, was still poring over his accounts. The street widened into a square flanked by neglected-looking Siva temples black with age, dilapidated tanks and cells overgrown with lantanum. Most of the houses were falling to pieces. From one window peeped a man's face, from the next a monkey's. A meditative monkey looking out of the window of an empty house stirs up latent antagonisms in the soul. He was searching himself like his human neighbour and stared at me as incuriously. I was incensed and looked about for a stone; it was some deep-seated race-feeling stirring in me. I burned for chastisement. He retreated slowly into the interior on some business of his own and re turned to the window looking more cynically indifferent, more hideously at home. I could not find a missile and I was too weary to go one step out of the way. And he knew it. So I left him in the house, in league, no doubt, with the goddess and her crew. That deity now had me in her thrall. I crawled into the bungalow sick of a fever and tired of life. It was forty-eight hours before I was strong enough to move. I lay in bed and watched the sacred mount and the grey flat-roofed houses climbing up it like a Levantine monastery on a sea cliff. The only note of relief in this sinister panorama was the bright skirts of the peasant women serpentining like a long thin caterpillar up and down the steps to Arjun Nanga.

In three days I was trudging deep in snow above the grey ilex forest over Dharmsala; it was just the bath the spirit needed. Here I was outside the circle of the Devi, in an air which no malign ray could penetrate. Instead of the Bhojkis I had for my companions Gurkhas, officers and men. The rhododendrons were a blaze of colour; the early blossoms had already fallen and were glowing like red coals on the snow. We sat under a tree and talked of what we were going to do, the peaks we would climb, the ranges we would circumvent; we made the circuit of the Nun Kun by Wardwan and Kishtwar, climbed Kohahoi, shot ammon in Hanle and I forgot there was such a thing in the world as a Hindu shrine.

END NOTES:

1. Dispensers of private charities left in trust to be distributed at certain shrines.
2. A stone platform built as a resting place for wayfarers.
3. These ornaments are described in "*English Wayfaring Life in the XIV Century*"— J J Jusserand. Fisher Unwin, p. 356.
4. Cited, Cunningham, *Archaeological Surveyor of India*, Report for year 1872-3.

6

OVER THE KHYBER

I

In the clear mornings and evenings of the cold weather one can see the hills sixty miles away—a low purple web with white threads strung across the Horizon like gossamer in hoar frost, a magic web with some enchantment in it. The heaped mountain chains behind it, one is told, deflect the surveyor's plummet; much more so the heart of man. I had a bare week for a journey, most of which I owed to the super-humanity of some old sage who ordained that fixed days in the year should be set apart for the needs of the spirit. I believe the personality of this good man is lost in the obscure mists of legend. His spiritual needs probably differed from mine, but I have no doubt he would have approved that I, an alien and unbeliever, of a generation ten—or is it twenty? —centuries after his teaching, should by dint of it be drawn into the hills. A day and night each way had to be given to the train. Five hundred miles in all and most of the day I spent looking out of the window, for the mountains were in sight nearly all the while. I left the base of the high ranges behind me. A friend in a post on the other side of the Khyber had given me the chance of spending three nights among the bare broken spurs that drop down into Afghanistan—mountains of no particular natural beauty, but invested with a human interest that appeals to Englishmen when they are tired of the forced air in which they live. I was glad to be for a day or two among men who pander to no weak-kneed gods.

One feels the difference in the air as the train speeds north—the difference in the air that makes the difference in men. It is a showery afternoon and the slant sun throws a glow on the mustard fields stretched like yellow scarfs across the red soil. The reflection of it burnishes the siris and shisham trees in their rufous winter garb of dried-up pod and leaf. The mountains loom a dull purple under the labouring clouds. A few miles north of Rawal Pindi we pass the point where Nicholson's gaunt monument guards the Pass, as if he still held the breach against the tribesmen. North of this it is the soldier who counts.

Between Lawrencepur and Campbellpur we enter a wide rolling plain, soft underfoot, with just the undulations a cavalryman loves. The talk in the carriage is of manoeuvres, the race for a hill or a bridge, the iniquity of umpires. It is here in the North that our best leaders of men have left their names. Jacobabad, Edwardesabad, Fort Sandeman, Lawrencepur—strange uneuphonious patronymics, alien to the soil. If we can stomach them, it is because our love for the men who bore them is great. Perhaps this is the only strip of Asia where the English place name is not a profanation. Deep under the soil lie buried Buddhist cities, Taxila and the capitals of Gandhara; but the North-West Frontier is primarily a battlefield. Cities that are not buried are destroyed; the land has no ancient shrines. But the brave ghosts who stride these fields and live in the people's mind, as well as in our own, are Englishmen. And their names survive fitly, for they were gods to the men they led and inspired in battle. One of them at least has become an *avatar* and the faithful scatter flowers on his altar and place lighted wicks in the niches of his shrine.

At Attock we cross the Indus, where the stream frets through a gorge no wider than its pentup channel in Chilas. I had expected a broad free stream, but the river strains along here as there. Seven hundred miles to the north, under the bold scarp of Nanga Parbat, I had followed the stream by moonlight, listening to its burden and thinking of it as soon to be free. Now, through the rattle of the train over the girders I imagined that I could hear the same under song, only angrier and more insistent, the voice of a river long baulked of its freedom. The fort above it looks like a natural excrescence. One cannot think of the brown rocky hill over the river without battlements. Bastions just like these must have frowned down on Alexander: the stone age man must have made the rock his citadel.

One can imagine that care and the consciousness of files in pigeon-holes sits lightly on the shoulders of that young officer riding at the head of his battery into the gates of the fort. As one goes north one is carried back into the past; every fifty miles is a decade towards individualism. At Peshawur a man is almost completely a man. In the Kurram or the Khyber the fire might still burn in a Nicholson, unquenched even in times of peace. One is still at the end of the telegraph poles, but every hundred miles of wire the coil is thinner, the current weaker; the voice of the Blue Funk School scarcely filters through. The "brass-hats" at Simla and Delhi are considerate—up to a point.

At Akola Khattak the veranda pillars of the station are sangared; there is a guard on the train. The tribesmen have had the impudence to fire into the blockhouse by Attock Bridge. Five weeks ago the Sangu Khels came down and looted the Calcutta mail at Jahangira Road, thirty-five miles from Peshawur. Two nights afterwards they raided Khaïrabad, the next station and carried off the Hindu assistant station master on ransom into the hills. The man was valued at Rs 1,800 and the money paid. Holding up the train was a new move on the part of the tribesmen. A Pathan wandering in Peshawur city had been drawn into a cinematograph booth and seen an American train looted. This gave him "the brain-wave," as my friend said. Otherwise he was unspoilt by Western education.

At Rawal Pindi I heard that an officer had been shot in Wana Fort the day before. Friends of mine in his regiment got into the train; they were going to his funeral at Mardan the next morning. There had been a Khattak dance in the fort, a kind of "send-off" to a Subadar who was going on pension. The young recruit was lying by his loaded rifle, as they do on this frontier, when he got up and shot his officer through the back at three yards; then he took cover and fired at the unarmed havildar who closed with him. He said he was sorry; he did not mean to do it and did not know why he did. He was excited by the music; the pipes got to his head. It is believed now that he was under the influence of a mullah and that he enlisted to become a *ghazi*, to enter Paradise by the click of a trigger; but he did not speak of these visions. A few months in the regiment might have moulded him otherwise– he was of plastic stuff–but the pipes awoke the fanatic in him, sent a drop of blood to his head. Justice was summary. The Political arrived at Wana the next day or two; he was tried at three and hanged at four.

One feels that the best men get shaken up to the top of the map or if they are not the best they soon become assimilated to the type. Everyone told me that the murdered man was of the very best. My friend Graeme, with whom I was going to stay beyond the Khyber, went to his funeral, so I had a day to spend in Peshawur. In the afternoon I drove round the city, a dean, dry, grey and brown city of caked mud, very compact within its walls. Many of the stalwarts one sees in the bazars are freebooters from over the border. They will return enriched, perhaps deviously by night threading the picquets at the foot of the hills; or they will leave rifle and loot buried somewhere until they come for it again and return unarmed, though not innocent-looking, driving the donkeys back that have carried wood into the bazar. It is an intriguing, mysterious city, with its full complement of robbers, secret police and cosmopolitan adventurers.

On Monday my friend returned and we started off to Landi Kotal. On the plain outside Peshawur I tried to shed my civil slough. Every squadron, company or battery we met impressed me more and more with the fact that a soldier's is the most consistently dean and thorough work that is done. My own "show" had seemed a particularly peddling and finicking business during the last few weeks and I put the thought of it from me with distaste. I believe I felt something of the contempt for myself and others of civil caste and occupation that the Pathan feels for the Hindu shopkeeper of his village, that poor necessary drudge who is allowed to go about unharmed so long as he wears the red-striped trousers, badge of his race, which protect him, like a woman's garment, from lead and steel. We met a squadron of the 1st Bengal Lancers exercising, two companies of the 51st Sikhs on reconnaissance, a battery of Field Artillery galloping across the boulders and broken banks of a dead river bed, one section supporting another as they fought a rearguard action; and at Jamrud the young remounts of the Khyber Rifles were learning to face "sights and sounds," nosing a traction-engine or a "stink-bike," sliding down shale slopes, making the acquaintance of everything new or loud or bright or hideously discordant with a decent horse's idea of the fitness of things.

Jamrud lies at the foot of the Pass. I will not write about the Khyber; it has been too often described for me to describe it. I can imagine the gorge rising at the epithets heaped upon it. The little mosque of Ali Masjid, by the patch of corn and willows, no bigger than a shepherd's hut, has become a name as often on men's lips as busy capitals. Let the faithful tie their red flag or tattered garment to the thorn bush by the shrine. The cairn is high enough; I will not fling another adjective or stone.

Besides, these hills are not unique, though the importance of them is. I have seen their like in many lands. Mountains in dry countries are always bare, broken, verdureless, ravine-bitten, strategically a nexus of ambushes, crag commanded by crag, passes innumerable, a warren of thieves, with a maze of bolt-holes to guard which needs a frontage of picquets extending over miles. On the map the line of posts of the Khyber Rifles would form a T, the head lying almost north and south from the Kabul River to Bara and the foot covering the thirty odd miles north-east and south-west—the length of the Pass from Jamrud to Tor Kham, where the road enters Afghanistan. To the north-east the Guides guard the Malakand; to the south and south-west the Kurram Militia, the North and South Waziristan Militia and the Zhob levies keep the road open across the frontier.

We reached our snug quarters in the fort at Landi Kotal, after a thirty miles' drive, in good time for lunch. The air here was as keen as a breeze off the North Foreland and we had the appetite of berserkers. In the afternoon we rode down the Pass to the frontier or the disputed track where the road is neglected by the Amir's Government and our own. Brown figures lined the crags, still as trees. The picquets were doubled, to guard the road for the Kabul kafila, which was due in the caravanserai at Landi Kotal before nightfall. We met the van of it four miles down the road, strong men on strong camels. The hairy Central Asian beast puts our own Indian breed to shame. It would have been a reversal of history if it were not so. Strength, whether in man or brute, has always passed south through this gorge and, remaining south, has become weakness.

We left Cavagnari's camp on our right and entered a sandy flat overgrown with scrub willow. An immense dark cliff, Tor Kham, overhung the valley to the south. Graeme sent a covering party to a rise on the left and we halted a little beyond it. "They might loose off at us here," he said, "if they saw us, but if we rounded that spur a furlong down the road it would be simply asking for trouble." We turned back. "You'll see the whole country tomorrow from Spina Sukha," he said consolingly. "If we have rain tonight you may see Jalalabad."

On the way home Graeme inspected the Michni Kandao blockhouse, the last on the frontier. The line of white boulders on the hill across the dip were range-stones. Ten white stones at a thousand yards, nine at nine hundred. They are too big for Khyber marksmen to waste powder on, so there are small white slabs, the size of your hat, laid parallel with them for rifle practice. I saw the men turn out to shoot. The Afridi on his own heath or scree, is part of the earth, like a markhor or chamois; whether it is fanged rock or a shelf of sliding shale it is all the same. Elbow and knee are firm and easy as the rifle comes up and he takes his sight. One feels that the weapon is as much a provision of nature as horn, tooth or claw. They shoot with a quiet glee. I could imagine the havildar saying as the dust flew up behind the mark, "There goes old Magdhali: damnation on his soul! So perish all his kin."

When they had pounded the small white stone to pieces Graeme climbed up the iron ladder into the blockhouse and I peeped in from the top rung. The sweet scent of a wood fire and hot *chapatties* greeted me from inside. The long, low-raftered room with the smooth boards, woollen supports and ladder leading up by a trapdoor to another floor and above all the smell of the flour, reminded me of an old water-mill I had haunted in my youth. From my perch I looked down on the road we had come up, winding under the heavy clouds into Afghanistan. The cave dwellers were herding their goats; we could see the thin line tailing into a black hole in the *khud and* donkeys following laden with their thorny provender.

The Michni Kandao blockhouse was attacked in 1908, during the Mohmund campaign, by a horde of Afghans. The garrison of forty had the time of their lives. The night was black as ink; the besiegers had got under the walls and were laying a charge of gunpowder, when the Khyber men took off their shirts, soaked them in oil and threw them over the parapet. In the flare they shot down twenty. Graeme was telling me about it when the havildar came up and I was introduced. "My friend Mr...., Havildar Mir Ashgar—he comes from the Ratgal valley in the Kuka Khel country." We shook hands. He had a grip which warned me to get in first with the next man—the loose, perfunctory, hyper-civilised handgrip is punished with cracked fingers. "May you never grow tired. You are the most welcome person," he said in Pushtu and I asked for his "holy health" in an Urdu he did not understand. He had prepared tea for us—a good warming drink. When we had finished we laid our cups upside down on a board, implying a thirst eternally quenched, as etiquette required. Graeme signed a voucher for 135 rounds, checked the empty cartridge-cases and we cantered off. The last picquets were coming in from the hills and the last camel of the Kafila was being prodded and dragged along the road into the caravanserai as we entered the gate of the fort.

My hosts would not talk shop that night, but there was a man dining in the Mess from the Mahsud border and he told me how they settle up feuds there. When both sides are tired, they come to the Political. He had just presided at a kind of *jirgah*, in which faction A and faction B met. They have a kind of *nirik-nameh* or tariff, like the list of current rates in the bazaar; but instead of grain and eggs and chickens the account is made up in the lives of men. A life here, a rape there, the theft of a bullock, are entered, discussed and in most cases admitted by the offending party. When the palaver is finished and the items checked the Political proceeds to strike them off, one against another, like a Bridge score. In this particular case it was found that the balance of offence lay with A faction; but, as my friend put it, it amounted to little more than "rubber points," A owed B 150 rupees: both parties were genuinely glad of a settlement and it was agreed that the representatives of A were to hand over the money to the representatives of B on the following Monday at noon, when, after some amiable formality, the feud would be declared at an end.

It was a broiling hot day in June and the Political's temper was not at its best when, after a ride of forty-three miles, he arrived at the little outpost that was to be the scene of the peacemaking. At noon the delegates had not put in an appearance; just as it was getting dark men came in with the news that two irresponsible young blades of B faction had ambushed the messengers who carried the money, shot them and made off with the spoil. The Political spoke a few terse words suitable to the occasion. He told the tribesmen in Pushtu that they were impossible and said that he would wash his hands of the whole affair. But as the elders on both sides were still for peace and the readjustment of the *nirik-nameh*, he agreed to reopen the case—on one condition. The two "young sparks" were to be hunted down at once and dispatched. To this B Faction did not demur, the young men's heads were forfeit; the elders offered to bring them into the Mess at......!It might seem that, with such eagerness for a settlement on both sides, peace was assured, but in the meanwhile the account had swollen. The two messengers of A were to be added to the *hissab*[1]—a heavy item. The Political passed it; B admitted it, but at the same time put in for payment on account of the two "young sparks." This the Political disallowed. The delegates, he said, were treacherously murdered; the "young sparks" were executed; it was an act of justice. But B faction did not see the difference, so the fat was in the fire again.

"Swine-dogs," was Graeme's comment. These Waziris are savages. Imagine two Afridis haggling over a *nirik-nameh* before a magistrate like a pair of old apple women.

The mere hint of the desire to avoid the obligations of honour is counted to a man's shame in the Khyber.

II

Snow fell on the hills in the night and there had been a sleety wind. When we got up in the morning we knew no film of dust or haze could veil Afghanistan. We rode out to Spina Sukha after lunch, over rolling plateaux, gradually ascending. The track we followed lying north and south, is used sometimes as a gun-running route between Kohat and the Mohmund country and it must be crossed by raiders returning from the plains between the Khyber and the Kabul River. We passed a maze of little passes where the track topped the ridge; it would take the best part of a company to picquet them and even then the loop-holes would be many by which these nighthawks might slip through. Nevertheless I would rather be a picquet than a raider. The upright form has little chance against the man lying tight under the rock. One shoots at sight or the shot echoes the challenge; no one is out for good on these dark nights.

"Don't you shoot the wrong man sometimes?" I asked Graeme.

"It did happen once, but it was a useful life. It stopped night-walking in the neighbourhood and made things simpler....These chaps can't live on their fields," he added indulgently.

"No, of course not!"

Obviously. The crops were thin and problematical. We were riding in a narrow gully between two Shinwari villages or groups of mud forts, each with its courtyard and loopholed tower.

"What is that rickety little tower doing in the middle of the field?" I asked.

"It was put up by the old sportsman in the house on the left to guard his crop. He was at feud with the people in the first house in the village opposite. You see that stony path between. Well, that's all dead ground; the tower covers it." Graeme pointed out the remains of the trench along which the old man used to creep to cover.

"What started it?" I asked.

"It is always a woman or a boundary-stone. A woman, I think, in this case; his son was the Lothario. The youth came into our hospital with a bullet in his knee, lodged there by a cousin. It looked a bad case, but the doctor mended him. 'I suppose we will have your cousin in next,' he said the day he sent him off. 'Not if I get a shot at him,' the lad answered. And he was quite solemn about it."

"Is the old chap dead?"

"No, I saw him the other day. They made up a truce or the other paid blood-money. I forget which. By Jove, there he is."

As we rounded the corner of the fortified *haveli* we came upon a group of Shinwaris squatting on the ground, deep in some palaver. One of them, the most benevolent, patriarchal-looking old gentleman, rose up and saluted the Kapitan Sahib. The others squatted stolidly and stared.

"He was one of our fellows," Graeme explained—"before my time, though. It was not a very big vendetta. The old chap himself has accounted for about fifteen; but it mounts up, of course, if you count collaterals."

Graeme stopped and talked and laughed with the patriarch and I sat musing on my horse, admiring the bluish tint a thorn hedge has in this cold, dry air. Outside the fortified wall of the house there were a few thin lines of corn between sandy spaces, like a field in High Hertfordshire. The crop looked as if it must wither before any moisture fell. The very tissue of the clouds seemed warped and dry, though the rocks glimmered with a slaty sheen as if freshly bathed in rain. The soil beyond the field was the skin-yellow of the ball of the foot. The crags above wore a faint veil of mauve. In this rocky setting the sparse cornfield with its single apricot tree in full blossom clearly etched against the sky, the herd of goats, the fortified tower, the group of immobile tribesmen with their rifles slung at their backs, made up a mountain pastoral—a pastoral with no allurement, nothing soft in it to wean folk from keen-edged reality or to lull them to dreams of any but first and last things.

Graeme told me as we rode away that the patriarch had been speaking of some young blade of his stock who had not been cut down in the family differences and who thought of enlisting in the Rifles. I dwelt inwardly on the initial usefulness of a recruit from these villages, a lad who had been a mark for a bullet from his infancy, who could slip through an enemy's country with a quiet heart and lie up like a hare in its form when the lead spattered against the stone by his side. I knew how he would slide his hand up to the bolt like a lover, his head becoming part of the still rock and get his own shot in before he budged. Our border militia is made of such stuff and when they have learnt from us everything there is to know about the last rifle we send them off to their homes.

Against these, when there is war, we bring men of diverse origin and training. Our own half-baked recruity will have to take his chance, a youth perhaps city-bred, born in tenements, amidst the smell of naphtha lamps, tar, beer and fried fish; municipally protected, unacquainted with anything more perilous than the kick of a coster's donkey or the fall of a brick. In youth his comings and goings have been guided by street names and policemen; he has moved along carefully aligned roads in rectilinear towns. He knows not the points of the compass or the stars or the dreadful whisperings of night. Earth has had for him but two elevations, the pavement and the kerb—yet such is the resilient disposition of the breed, the inspired conceit, he will not be awed when he looks for the first time on her naked face, though he has no more instinct for cover than a brewer's dray-horse.

Urgency and the fullness of time may in the end make as good a man of him "at the end of a gun" as a border Pathan, but my respect for our officers increases when I think how nonchalantly they hold the passes and pray for "a show," though we may have a hundred and fifty thousand of these wolves on our flanks if the frontier rises when next we cross the Khyber.

Of course every Sahib believes in his own men and it has been proved time after time that the English officer can count on the Pathans loyalty. There are a number of Zakka Khels in the Khyber Rifles. When our punitive expedition entered their country in 1908 the Political called the tribesmen in the corps and told them he would not ask them to fight against their own blood. They might all take six months' leave if they liked and no questions would be asked when they came back. The spirit of the offer appealed to them and they stayed.

Our officers get on as well with these tribesmen as they do with any Aryan stock or with any Semitic stock domiciled within the border. "The Pathan is more like an Englishman," they say if you ask them why. Or, "they are such sporting fellows." And one wonders, remembering how bloody, treacherous and ruthless they can be. Our code is not theirs. But the nature of a code is incidental; loyalty to it is the main thing. The small community that can hold together by an unwritten law and maintain its independence, if not saved, is at least "eligible for salvation," as my Babu friend would say.

They respect sanctuary and truce; but certain acts are followed by certain consequences. A blow to a man or an insult to a woman means death. The life of the aggressor is forfeit: it may be filched by any wile and the feud extends to the blood relations, male and female, on both sides.

Being naked, sick or asleep does not save one from a bullet in the back. This is not treachery but law; it is all part of the game and makes for alertness. I had not realised how general these vendettas are. It happens as often as not that when a man goes on leave from his regiment he must conceal the day he starts or he will be stalked like a mountain sheep and once in his village he must lie up till it is time to go back and return by a circuitous route. Passion may keep a man's blood at the required heat, but it must be galling to be drawn into the quarrel of some fool of a collateral whom one values less than a round or two of cartridges. Yet the Pathan does not seem to mind his liberty being circumscribed in this way.

"It is like milk in his tea," Graeme explained. "You see, they have no nerves. It is no strain to them to be always stalking and being stalked."

It is part of the day's work, though the feud may be a mere obligation, a matter of form with little passion in it. Peace, though rare, is not prized. The road is sanctuary and a man whose house is nearby can dig a communication trench to it and sit and smoke his *huqa* in the sun all day under his enemy's eye; yet the privilege does not seem to be valued highly. The tribesman's tower and courtyard are bounds sufficient for his body and spirit and when there is ploughing or reaping the need will be common and a truce can easily be patched up. In the regiment, I think, they are glad to ease the strain. Here the unwritten law is inviolable. Even when the sore is new or revived the man is safe; his blood enemy will stay his hand when it is against the code to shoot. A man may have to watch philosophically in a lonely picquet all night with the muzzle of his rifle against the side of his heart's abhorrence, whom he has been lying-up for in his village and whom he will lie up for again. The psychology of such meditation under the stars is a subject made for a poet's hand.

As for the Sahib, there is always the chance of a *ghazi* in the regiment. The present Commandant of the Khyber Rifles was shot through the stomach at point-blank range in the veranda of his mess; the bullet passed through his back and he survived by a miracle. Graeme pointed me out a youth who was road making in the Pass, another visionary perhaps like the Wana assassin, but ridden by gentler spooks. The lad, whose name was Dhandal, had an honest dreamy face. He had been in the Khyber Rifles, but he had to leave, as he saw fairies. They came to him awake and asleep. They visited him once on sentry duty and he challenged Graeme three times, but did not seem to hear his "Friend." He started after him in stealthy pursuit, with his loaded rifle stretched out as if he meant to bayonet him in the back. A subaltern following saw what was going on and was just in time to snatch the rifle from him. He remembered nothing of it when the fairies left him and was very unhappy when he had to leave the regiment and take up road work instead of soldiering, although it meant fifteen rupees a month instead of nine.

I wondered how a sociologist would place these tribesmen. He might describe their state as a kind of socialism, because privilege is unknown among them, unless it is the privilege of being more manly than one's neighbour or of having a finer sight to one's rifle or a more cleanly-sliding bolt, things acquired by inherent manhood more often than by heredity. Or he might describe them as individualists, because public opinion is sufficient control for them without law. Collectively the tribes preserve an easy federalism; among themselves they are individualists in times of peace, socialists in a tribal emergency–a simple solution of difficulties and one denied to more complex organisms. Theirs is the social state from which we are so feverishly flying. No two political ideals could be more antithetical than those of the patriarch and Mr. Lloyd George. Yet both are idealists. A border village might stand for the visualised hell of beadledom; and hell or bedlam to these blades would be a community in which one is pampered, protected, salaried, pensioned, insured, where men are given a money payment in a public law court by way of compensation for the infidelity of their wives.

The path broke up and we dismounted and walked through thorns to Spina Sukha. To be with a keen man on his own ground and to get him to talk about his work is an experience I always covet, especially when it is work which calls for the handling of men under conditions in which personality counts for more than the machine. I learnt much on that hill about raids and feuds and the heart of a Pathan.

At five in the evening we stood on the spur and looked across the wide plain of Afghanistan to where the distant clouds hid the summits of the Hindu Kush. There had been rain across the frontier; I can think of no image to describe how clean and new-bathed the country looked. Dakka lay right under us among the cornfields by the Kabul River and Lalpura, the nearest Afghan cantonment, a few miles beyond. We could see where the Kabul road makes the great bend west-ward, skirting low hills and marsh and farther to the north-west the dark patch of wood and rock that shadows Jalalabad. As a new chart in the mental Atlas one likes to carry about in one's head, it was the most satisfying view I had seen.

The next day we turned our faces southwards. Two hours in a motorcar took us over the Pass, back to modernity and the hot forced air of progress. We were received again by the unhappy land of whose troubles we have made ourselves coheirs. Right in the path from Jamrud to Peshawur, as if to remind us of our joint inheritance, stands an enormous towered college. It is yet in the building, but it is to be the forcing-house of the new generation. Young men are to come here from over the frontier to ''gentle their condition," to acquire by mild persuasion a culture and code which, as Graeme put it, has only been rubbed into us with great difficulty and after some centuries, at the end of a stick. As far as the training of character goes, they have worked out a system for themselves, which at least ensures the young barbarian an inherent manliness, self-reliance, respect for his parents, loyalty to tradition. In the place of this we invite them to seek a spurious salvation. The state of mind of a Mahsud BA is unthinkable, whether he returns to eat his heart out in his village, scorned and scornful or remains to drive a degenerate quill in a Government office. Allah never meant him for a *vakil.* One cannot picture him taking his stand with his Indian cousin on "platforms" whose figurative "planks" groan under the weight of ideals, principles, aspirations, causes, education in citizenship and all the rest. I have an impious hope that the Moral Reader may never find its way into the patriarch's house or divert the disciplinary bullet a hair's breadth.

In Peshawur I asked a Hindu why they were building this great Muhammadan college and he told me among other things that it was to bring "civilised blessing of peace upon benighted frontier." to "soften turbulent tribesman," to "ameliorate his condition," and to "render him amenable to law." Nevertheless I gathered that this fostering of Islam was viewed with suspicion by his community. The man who is a Hindu first and a Nationalist afterwards, resents it. He knows that if these tribesmen are gathered into the net of "progress" there will be no more talk of a pampered Muhammadan minority or of Islam going to the wall in a premature Swaraj. But the extremist, if he still exists, must be laughing in his sleeve, for it is as impolitic as it is unkind to hybridise the Pathan. It is better for us to have hordes of declared freebooters on our flanks, whom we can fight and understand, than an intriguing hybrid people who will traffic with the enemy inside our gates. Heaven defend us from an agitated frontier, sensitive to political catch words, jealous of privilege, suspicious of grievances, sucking its wisdom from the lips of demagogues and lawyers! It will be a sad day when the jolly urchin, who flings us his *starri mshai*, "May you never grow tired!" across the road, greets us with a pert "Good marning!"

END NOTES:

1. Bill

7

THE BAKHTIARI FOOTHILLS

I

When I saw the hills in Mesopotamia they were always the background to some human or political drama. The Hun, pursuing his dream of conquest in the East, was busy with the tribesmen. The opportunity for a Jehad was never more favourable. The land of anarchy between the Kurdish frontier and Afghanistan could easily be stirred; and though it was difficult to direct or control the currents, any kind of quasi-religious or political disturbance was so much to the good. Geographically Persia promised the most fruitful soil for the seeds of Kultur. The tares sown there could not fail to blow into our harvest whatever way the weather-cock pointed. There were the tribes on our flank in Mesopotamia as well as our old friends of the Indian frontier and the Kurds to the north and west who could have no friendly traffic with the Cossacks and the Tangistanis to the south who were irritated by our intervention in Bushire. And where the Hun had no plausible pretext for a crusade there was always the *auri sacra fames* to appeal to. Altogether the more vigorous elements of Persian society had a good time. They grew rich and they did not pay back much in service.

And so, when one wandered in the Persian hills one often found oneself on the trail of these picturesque apostles of Kultur, men who, striking out a new line of adventure, stuck at nothing mediaeval. Not that one expected to see these mysterious beings. They evaporated. But they had been there. At Shuster I had a picture of Wasmuss genuflecting on his own praying-carpet in the house of a Seyyid. At Siri Pul I heard of Neidermayer in Persian garb smoking his Kaliun in the black tents of the Sinjabis, a lavish dispenser of gold; his missionary zeal afterwards carried him to Afghanistan, where he was interned for a while by the Amir. One heard stories everywhere of the wonderful Hun—of Pugin with his semi-royal escort, the mouth-piece of the All-Highest at Ispahan; his ear to the wireless receiver, he sonorously delivers the message to the faithful transmitted by the defender of the faith, even in Potsdam. Further east Zugmayer and Greisinger are sacrificing a sheep and a cow in Kerman, while Haji Manicke reads a forged proclamation of the Jehad in a coffee-house at Lingah. All these masqueraders lived the life of Orientals, squatted eastern fashion, were Shiah or Sunni, wore the turban or the fez in Tabriz or Baghdad according to the land of their adoption and more than one was credited with going through with the physical qualification of a convert to Islam.

I met some of the tribesmen, Arabs, Kurds Lurs and others who had intrigued with the Hun and received arms and money from him. They had given little in return. Most of these cheerful brigands called themselves "democrats" and so were ready to throw in their lot with the Kaiser, whose emissaries were lavish with gold and whose legions were too far away to cast any perceptible shadow over their independence. Even if any of them were far-sighted enough to perceive a shadow, they were not troubled by it. The substance behind it was too remote; and for the time being it was a friendly shadow which promised to swallow and absorb the more imminent shade that has always darkened the Persian sun.

Nearly every Persian is, first of all, a nationalist. He would not be human if he were not. His hatred of interference and dictation is a very natural and genuine passion and the one contact in life from which he shrinks most is the hug of the Russian bear. As for the Jehad, the Persians are an intelligent people and I do not believe that it deceived anyone. The Kaiser's conversion to Islam, if it were credited, would only affect fire-brands like Seyyid Isa of Ram Hornuz. Nevertheless it was a convenient flag to fly beside the standard of nationalism.

The Persians' quarrel with us was that we had ranged ourselves with the Russians. The Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907 was a blow to the nationalists; they could not get rid of the idea that the interests of Persia and Great Britain were antagonistic. It had been their traditional policy to play one off against the other and the idea of spheres of influence was abhorrent to them. Down in the south where the Russian menace was less acute we had friends on whom we could count. The Sheikh of Muhammerah, whose interests were identical with ours, was a staunch ally. Then there were the Bakhtiaris, whose vacillating allegiance inclined to the British. For the Khans were shareholders in the Anglo-Persian Oil Company; their income from the wells alone probably exceeds all their other combined resources of revenue and it is yearly increasing.

II

The first time I escaped from the Tigris to the hills was after the fall of Kut and I got away for a few weeks to the Bakhtiari country. It was the last half of May. The heat at Ahwaz, Maidan-i-Naftun and Shuster was intense. But anything was a relief after the gloom of the Tigris valley. The Relieving Force had lost 21,000 men in trying to save 9,000 in Kut and had not saved them. Those long months in the hideous flat where so many of one's friends lay buried made the sight of the hills more desirable. The Kut experience sealed any prejudice one may have had for the bare, hot, uncompromising delta. It was a country of one mood. Its treelessness, stonelessness and monotony were associated with stagnation and death and the impression is not likely to fade.

A traveller[1] who visited the oilfields in 1909 described Maidan-i-Naftun as one of the ugliest places in the world. "The dirty, grey and yellow hills that surround it," he wrote, "are desolate and forbidding to a degree. Not a tree or a bush is to be found anywhere within twenty miles and when I was there not a blade of grass to relieve the monotony." That is how Maidan-i-Naftun appeared to a man descending from the high Persian mountains to the foothills. If he had been going the other way earlier in the year he might have discovered beauty in these ranges. Even in the last week of May there were flowers. I remember a princely spear-thistle and a teazle of ultramarine blue growing on the hillside where there was not a vestige of shade. In any depression that offered half a day's shelter from the sun you might gather mignonette, mullein, larkspur, scabious, convolvulus, sage, rocket, borage—the flora of a home gravel-pit; and I could tell by the seeds that if I had been six weeks earlier I should have seen constellations of narcissus, crocus and anemone starring the grass. Riding from Salamat to Ab Gungi under the Tul-i-Khayyat (Tailor's Hill) the sweeping downland appeared as beautiful to me as Dartmoor to a convict escaped from Princetown gaol. There is a rare symmetry in these hills. The northern face of Tul-i-Khayyat falls away into the Lehbarri plain in a series of platforms like tiers in an amphitheatre. The Leh-barri plain, through which the Radha flows, is rolling grass land. North of it the gypsum range, the Imam Riza, lies east and west. Here there is more symmetry, only on a different plan, rounded crenellations like the bastions of a city wall. In the next range the lines of crests are horizontal, flat and table-topped. There was design everywhere and for many months I had seen none.

One drops down from the Imam Riza to the oilfields. They lie in a Q-shaped cup and the tail of the Q leads up from Tembi, where the power-house is at the foot of the pass. Two enormous columns of smoke told us where the wells lay. It was escape oil burning. The pipes, which had been cut by the Bawi and Anafizah tribes near Ahwaz in the disturbances of February, were still under repair. Meanwhile, the oil which ought to have been feeding the refineries at Abadan had to be destroyed. Where there is a good flow, as at Maidan-i-Naftun, the oil floods up and discharges itself at high pressure into the pipes and is carried by its own momentum into the storage tanks. No pumping is needed. The only difficulty is to control it. To close a valve in the pipe at the surface of the well is simple enough, but it is seldom wise, as the subterranean force which you have unloosed is eccentric and not easily disciplined. A block is apt to disturb the strata and plug up the channels, creating a commotion which may put the well out of action for weeks. So when the passage to the refineries is stopped the oil and gas are carried off into side pipes and burnt. The immense columns of smoke and flame where the escape oil was burning day and night depressed me with an uncomfortable sense of waste. The flames leapt up sixty feet in the air in a circumference of twenty with a roar like breakers and above them rose a solid column of blue smoke. At a certain height it caught the breeze and was deflected, but it was still so dense that riding under it a full five hundred yards from the flame one felt protection from the sun. The manager laughed at my economical scruples. "If you were a millionaire," he said, "you wouldn't mind if your butler opened an extra bottle of port. Besides, where could you store the oil? It would soon flood a respectable valley and then if a spark got to it..."

The oil, it seems, is inexhaustible and if you humour it and give it its head underground it is singularly docile when it reaches the upper air. Its violence is all subterranean and the miner's chief anxiety is lest it should spurt up in sudden gushes and carry away rig and derrick. Once above ground it finds its way to the storage tanks and power-house. From the pumping station at Tembi it is lifted over the two ranges, the Imam Riza and the Tul-i-Khayyat; and from the second ridge it flows without obstruction to the refinery at Abadan on the Shatt-al-Arab, 142 miles from the fields. The pass over the Tul-i-Khayyat is 1,300 feet and the pressure on the pipes here is 600 lbs to the square inch. One is struck by the economy of transport. Oil, unlike other products of mines, needs no railway with its costly rolling stock, imported fuel and gangs of workmen. It supplies its own power like a rational monster pent up in the bowels of the earth and ready to lend a hand, in its own release. Both in production and in transmission you have the same economy. Where a well is being bored you will find under one rig a single white mechanic and half a dozen wild-looking Bakhtiari assistants whose limbs remind one of figures on a Greek frieze. The driller and the tribesmen communicate in a jargon which is neither English nor Persian, but understood by both. It comprises half a dozen adjectives very forcible and explicit, the single inflection of some three common verbs which does duty for all tenses and moods and a number of substantives mostly of a highly technical kind. The Lur or Bakhtiari in the Persian oilfields is as familiar with spudding shoes, clamps, gauges, under-reames and bits as the product of a Schenectady engineering school.

went on stolidly fishing and the Bakhtiaris squatted on the floor of the rig looking dully expectant; After a month the Canadian dragged up the sand pump which ought by all rules of the game to have been at the bottom of the whole bag of tricks. His next catch was the swivel which had parted from the sinker. Then he brought up the pole and socket. There remained the sinker and the rope-spear. These, as far as I know, were never recovered. They were probably jammed into the side of the shaft, for when next I heard of the well drilling had been continued. That Canadian fishing for his tools was the most monumental instance of patience and faith I have witnessed.

This particular well may have been sunk to 8,000 feet through hard rock. Such a depth is not abnormal and rock is preferred to softer strata, for though the drilling is slower the sides of the shaft are more secure and there is less danger of caving in. As a rule, the deeper the well is sunk the finer the oil. There are surface wells within a mile or two of the fields, but the oil is too heavy and not in sufficient quantity to make it worth while working them. The oil rises from the bed of the stream or oozes into the water from the banks. The tribesmen have tapped this supply for centuries. They never bore. Their process is to bank up the stream, let the water filter through and collect the oil in mussaqs. It is conveyed on mules to Shuster, where most of it is converted into bitumen, which is used for caulking boats. It is also valued as a cure for mange, especially among camels. The Lurs and Bakhtiaris are only now beginning to use it for cooking and heating. But the practice is purely local. The Persians still cling to their camel- and cow-dung fuel and it has never occurred to them to make use of this rich substitute at their doors.

The gorge where the wells rise is an uncanny spot. Entering it, one is nearly poisoned by the reek of gas. The gypsum wells on the hillside contain sulphur ore and it is a positive relief to break off a bit of brimstone, put a match to it and inhale a different kind of smell. It is the kind of place to give one bad dreams and one wonders that the superstitious Bakhtiaris can be brought to visit it at all. One might easily be suffocated here and become the prey of djinns, for nature does not lay bare elements, which are usually decently hidden, without mischief or derangement of some

I was taken to a rig where a Canadian was fishing for lost gear. In boring the shaft the heavy blunt-nosed steel bit which pulverises the rock is attached to the sinker, a sixteen-foot steel rod. This is connected with the wire rope by jars and swivel and suspended from an oscillating walking-beam which overhangs the shaft. The process of boring is simple so long as the string of tools hangs together, but the wire rope, sockets, jars, sinker and bit are put to an inordinate strain; and if any of these give, the shaft is blocked and work comes to a standstill. Another source of trouble is when the casing of the shaft gives through heavy gas pressure or the parting of the joints. In any of these emergencies the driller has to lay aside his tools and fish. He may fish for months and not recover the lost part. In that case it is a question of a new shaft and the abandonment of the well —a tragedy of wasted labour which is the worst thing that can happen to the mining engineer.

I found the Canadian solemnly and patiently fishing while the half-naked Bakhtiaris sat round him wistfully looking for a sign. The trouble had begun two months before with the breaking of the sand pump, the cylindrical vessel which is lowered after every foot or two of boring to remove the pulverised debris. The pump had broken off and carried away some of the steel rope with it. The driller's first business was to fish for the gear with a tenacious barbed and pronged instrument known as the rope-spear. This he attached to a sinker and let fall heavily among the strands of the cable. He secured his grip, but the pump was so firmly embedded that it would not give. It was impossible to shift the thing without breaking the line. Heavier machinery had to come into play. So the engineer cut the rope just above the swivel and ran in a series of iron fishing poles with a socket at the end to catch hold of the sinker to which the rope-spear was attached. The bottom pole gave with the socket. Thus the History of the House that Jack Built repeated itself, only none of the parts played their part and every lap in the story was a *coup manque*. We have now in order from top to bottom the iron fishing pole with the socket which would not catch the sinker, the swivel and sinker, the rope-spear, the sand pump, all lying in layers of obstruction some thousand feet underground blocking up the shaft. It was enough to take the heart out of a man, but the Canadian went on stolidly fishing and the Bakhtiaris squatted on the floor of the rig looking dully expectant; After a month the Canadian dragged up the sand pump which ought by all rules of the game to have been at the bottom of the whole bag of tricks. His next catch was the swivel which had parted from the sinker. Then he brought up the pole and socket. There remained the sinker and the rope-spear. These, as far as I know, were never recovered. They were probably jammed into the side of the shaft, for when next I heard of the well drilling had been continued. That Canadian fishing for his tools was the most monumental instance of patience and faith I have witnessed.

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Yet there are flowers and butterflies and locusts in the valley, insects whose bodies have been dipped in gorgeous dyes of orange, scarlet and green. I even saw fish steering placidly between the viscous coils of naphtha. Green reeds grew out of the dingy sediment on the banks. The white hollyhocks were in full bloom. They and the mignonette and mullein and larkspur gave the lie to malevolence unless these were the lure of the djinn like the rainbow scum on the polluted stream.

No! These hills are not ugly. Neither has man spoiled them. There are even pastoral scenes within half an hour's ride of the workshops. At Chasm All you will find the goatherd by the spring under the plum tree and the same flowers, down to the little thistle-like centaury that cover the Karewas of Kashmir. Near Chasm Ali is Masjid-i-Suliman, the most legend-haunted spot in the Bakhtiari hills. A natural platform projects squarely from the hillside into the plain and forms the plinth of one of the great fire temples of ancient Elymais; or such was Rawlinson's conjecture, though the cellars and tombs have not yielded their mystery yet. There is a certain human poetry, too, in the remote colony who are conspiring with the oil in its struggles to reach the upper air. That Canadian with his grave, sad smile standing over the abortive shaft, those wistful, half-naked Bakhtiaris under the derrick looking for a sign that the mysterious agency had been propitiated, offered a group for an artist who understood the drama in which they were engaged. There was poetry here which would have touched a deep vein in MacAndrew's soul. There is nothing to shock an aesthetic in the harnessing of nature in these uplands. The snakey black naphtha roads, the spotted, scaly stream in which the surface oil looks like the slime on an alligator's back, the belching fumes, the power-house, water-tanks, gasometers, derricks, do not depress one as the uglification of pastoral Staffordshire or War-wick. There is no stripping bare of beauty or hint of ravage. Earth here is not sensitive to wounds.- She is naked, elemental, fresh from the chaotic mould, altogether too big to feel the prickings and borings of machinery.

III

When I was at Maidan-i-Naftun the topic of the hour among the Bakhtiaris was the exchange of a junior Khan, one Salar-i-Masud, prisoner of war, for the notorious firebrand, Seyyid Isa of Ram Hormuz, the most incendiary of Jehadists. Salar-i-Masud had been fighting for the Turks against the Russians on the Kermanshah side and when returning to his own country he and his Bakhtiari following had been intercepted by our cavalry on the River Diz. There had been a small action in which a few of the Bakhtiaris had been killed or drowned and two hundred captured. The two Khans and the gendarmerie were retained as prisoners, the others were released. Salar-i-Masud seemed injured and surprised that we should have attacked him. He had no quarrel with the British, he explained; he had joined the Turk to fight the Russian, his hereditary foe.

It was thought that the exchange of Seyyid Isa, a man of God with flaming eyes, for Salar-i-Masud, a mere dandified swashbuckler, might be taken in ill-part by the people of Shuster and I was warned that I should be circumspect in my ways there.

Shuster is known for its filth, heat and fanatics. It is probably the most dirty, religious and immoral town in Persia. Outwardly the place is not characteristically Persian, the town and the people have an individuality of their own; inwardly, I believe, it is the quintessence of old-world Persia, not the ripe fruit ready to fall, but dry and withered fruit on the dead bough.

The dirt, of course, is the most evident of the three evils to which Shuster owes its ill-fame and the smell which is the soul of dirt. The town challenges Hitt and Mosul for preeminence in filth. Mosul, I believe, stands first. Hitt, I can vouch for. Shuster is probably less dirty than it was, for it is less populous. It is true that every house is provided with a cavity flush with the street into which its offal is shot; also that each street is a sewer. This is the rule in the East. But when every inhabitant of a city taints six foot of cubic air through the habits of indiscipline a dwindling census within a constant perimeter must be a step to healthier conditions.

I have seen entirely deserted cities inhabited by monkeys and lizards. They are not so mournful as these half-dead cities where the living pass dreamily through the silent streets. Many of the big houses stood empty and there were acres of humbler dwellings which had been levelled with the ground. Some of the demolition, I was told, was strategic and connected with the line of fire between mohalla and mohallo (quarter). For Shuster is troubled by faction. There is generally shooting going on. The difficult thing for a stranger is to reconcile the gentle, rather effeminate, appearance of the citizens with the reputation the town enjoys for disturbance. The Shusteri has a distinctive dress and a distinctive physiognomy of his own which is not martial. They are bird-like, perky little men and their origin is something of a mystery. An Orientalist has told me that he thinks that it is an Elamite strain. Another traces it to Israel. He believes that the Shusteris are a relic of a Jewish colony, the protegees of some Semitic wife of an Irani prince. These women, he argues, were loyal to their people and used their influence to get them established. One can believe the Shusteri the issue of a kind of peaceful petticoat penetration on the heels of Cupid.

The merchant Abdulla, who put me up in Shuster, was away and I gathered my first impressions of the place from his young cousin, Ibrahim, a pleasant frankified boy of seventeen, neither "democratic" nor intellectual, but speaking a little English. We made our first tour of the city on foot. Ibrahim did not understand why I wanted to see the dirty purlieus of the place. He wished me to spend all my time by the fort and the river front. When I tried a lead down some alley he would protest, "Can't go that way–too dirty–no road–houses all broken." I knew how it irks the young Oriental's gentility to be seen walking on foot in mean places, rubbing shoulders with mean people, so I humoured him. He agreed to ride with me in the "bad parts" the next morning.

"We have a wicked horse," he said. "Nobody will ride him except Abdulla, who is away. Will you ride him?"

Of course, I had to accept the challenge and in the morning a very fiery-looking steed was brought to the door for me and a very mild one for Ibrahim, who mounted and withdrew to a safe distance, watching me curiously to see what would happen. The animal made more noise than any horse I have ever seen and he had the swanniest movements of the neck and the most ferocious amble; otherwise he was tender-mouthed and as gentle as a lamb. Ibrahim was very nervous lest I should come near him and always looking round suspiciously.

I thought this explained the way he raced ahead in the labyrinth of alleys and his disapproval of my leisurely inspection. But at last he unburdened himself and entreated me to follow him to some more public place. These half abandoned mohallas held real or imagined, danger for him. "Shusteris very bad people," he explained; "very impolite. They shoot."

"Why do they shoot?" I asked.

"Some like British. Some like Germans. Some only like Muhammadans."

"And they shoot people they don't like?"

"See here. Back of house. No one knows. They don't like my brother and me. We wear breeches and tie like a English and French peepell. Say Consul told us to shoot Sheikh. So perhaps shoot you. Some like British. Some like Germans...."

I had been warned that I might find Shuster unsettled and this ingenuous confirmation of the warning puzzled me the more as for a long time I did not see the figure of a man in the streets who might conceivably pose as a swashbuckler. Then I met some useful-looking armed Bakhtiaris in the bazar. I was told they used to escort the Deputy Governor of Arabistan and Luristan, when he came to Shuster and collected taxes. Now the Deputy Governor does not come and they collect taxes on their own—with interest. The presence of the Bakhtiaris gave me a dim insight into the politics of the place. There had been some intermittent firing in the night, whether at thieves, shadows or adulterers, was not clear—probably at all three.

The trouble at Shuster had little or nothing to do with German intrigue or the war. The Shusteris have always been like this. They live in a backwater. Their quarrel is local and not political in a national sense. They were not greatly stirred by the mejliss. The British and German bid for a more friendly neutrality did not interest them much. Even the eloquence of Wasmuss left them cold. At the time of my visit there was a squabble about which mohalla a particular shop should belong to and the personal covetousness involved in the question entirely precluded a crusade. I was a little enlightened when Ibrahim told me that there were twelve "masters" in the town, each one the headman of a mohalla. These were the permanent factions, it seemed and they were complicated by relations with the Khans of the Bakhtiaris and the Sheikh of Muhammerah's following, between whom there was a perpetual feud. Then there were the Seyyids, whose sanctity and numbers explained the reputed fanaticism of the place. I was not able to learn much of their temporal influence and interests, but I gathered that they were not virulently anti-foreign. The true Shiah, like the Jesuit and Calvinist, is more readily provoked by the heretic and schismatic than by the unbeliever. The desecration of the tombs at Meshed by the Russians was an infidel sacrilege. Infidels may deserve to be extirpated, but the worst offenders are the unfaithful among the faithful, the shelling of the tomb of Hussein at Kerbela by the Turks was the last impiety.

The Seyyids were not responsive to the blandishments of Wasmuss, who had stayed in Shuster. Ibrahim pointed out to me the house where he spread his praying-mat. Outside there was a beggar woman sitting. Ibrahim pulled up his horse and pointed to her. "This poor woman is asking for money," he said. I put my hand in my pocket, but could only find a large piece of silver. This I gave her a little unwillingly, for it would have been a scurvy trick to have passed on after stopping and fumbling in one's pockets. The woman rose with dignity and invoked blessings on my head. I asked Ibrahim to translate. The thread of her thanksgiving, interspersed with the usual picturesque benedictions, was that now she could go home to her house, that she need not beg any more that day or the next or the next. She rose up with the air of a released drudge. She was going to "take a holiday," as Ibrahim put it, having been lately liberated from school himself. He and I were mightily pleased. The releasing of a beggar from an uncongenial vocation was a use of alms-giving that had never occurred to me before.

Ibrahim was relieved to be in a more public quarter of the town. He took me to the citadel again and we stood on a roof a hundred feet above the river. Then we went to Valerian's bridge. The weir beneath was built by the Emperor during his captivity with the Sassanians when the inhuman

Shapur made him wear a slave's fetters over the imperial purple and according to the legend used him as a mounting block. The bridge in use today, over which the Ispahan road enters the city from the hills, is a mile downstream and connected with a blue-tiled Mosque. Here a canal is cut through a passage in the limestone cliff and comes gushing through the rock, an amphitheatre of fountains and mill-races and discharges itself into the pool below. There is an island in the green swirling water in the centre and mills enough to grind flour for all Persia. Downstream, under the shade of the cliff, there were some attractive gardens. The owner of one of them, Mustapha Khan, a gentle and rather fragile little man of marked dignity, invited us in. I accepted gladly. It was a cool spot. The narrowness of the gorge excluded the sun for many hours of the day and there was a continual flow of water, so that I was not astonished to see groves of poplar mixed with palms and mulberries and six-foot hollyhocks standing out fat and fresh amongst exotic peppers and pomegranates, as if they grew in an English border. Another garden a few hundred yards farther upstream, where the gorge was broader and got a little sun, was planted solely with palms and oranges. The grace of the palms was set off by the background. Towards the summit the face of the cliff became a castle or what seemed a series of castles, for it was only their beetling position on the bluff and the solid rock of their foundations that gave the houses this appearance. One of them belonged to Mustapha Khan. He took us through the narrow causeway under the arch, through which the mules came to water and up to a gate which he opened with a massive key, big enough to fell a man, which turned three times in the lock. He did not enter at once, but stood in the doorway calling out some warning. Ibrahim explained by a gesture that etiquette required that we should wait a moment or two and not follow our host too closely. In the meanwhile we could hear the scurrying of light feet. When they had passed he took us up a flight of steps to his balcony on the rock which hung sheer over the river. A terrible prospect for refractory wives who did not patter off when they heard a stranger's footsteps. A sack and a trap-door in the Bosphorus would be a mere bagatelle to such a descent.

"He is one of the twelve masters," Ibrahim whispered.

I regarded him with a new respect. It was hard to believe the meek little man trafficked with assassins; but I was far from initiated into the politics or psychology of Shuster.

When we left Mustapha's serdab[2] the heat was intense. It was the first day of June and the storks stood with gaping bills beside their nests. They build on the mosques and on the corner turrets of the roofs. When the minaret crumbles and the Muezzin leaves it to call the azan elsewhere, the stork takes his place. Shuster is a town of storks and blue mosques and jays. Blue is the one note that relieves the dun and khaki of the streets and houses. Four of the principal mosques, the gateway of the fort, some private houses and the gateway to Valerian's bridge have blue-tiles. New graves are tessellated with them and the same shade is repeated in the wings of the jays that haunt Valerian's bridge. Some of the jars in the shops are blue-glazed and they lend colour to the dingy interior where the druggist sits over his scales and weighs his drugs against pebble weights. When we reached Abdulla's house the gateway was open and the courtyard was thronged with Seyyids. They had come to borrow his spacious veranda for a reading of the Koran. It was an unexpected visitation and poor Ibrahim's embarrassment was amusing. He tried to get me out of the way to a side door. But it was not to be. The aristocrats of the church, with their parchment brows under the green turban, were coming out into the street and he had to run the gauntlet of peering eyes in the company of a Kafir. I was sorry for him and wished that I could spirit my Frankish presence away. To make things worse the school was disgorging its small fry over the way and they cried out stridently, "Feringhi and servant of a Feringhi, what have you come here to see?"

Shuster, I am afraid, if not fanatical, is a suspicious place, a desolate, self-centred, conservative little city, as dirty, hot, factious, religious and no doubt as immoral, as it is painted. Ibrahim had seen too much of the outer world to be at home in it. He was a kindly boy and laid himself out to make me feel welcome. When he saw me off I fancied that he wanted to come too and regretted the amenities of Basra and civilisation. His travels had unsettled him.

At Derra Ghazineh, on the road to Ahwaz, I met an Englishman who asked me how things were going at Shuster. "Fairly well," I told him. "There has been a bit of shooting at nights– nothing to speak of."

"Oh! that is local," he said. "They are always at it. I thought perhaps this Seyyid Isa business might have upset them. You know the Khans have swopped him for Salar-i-Masud."

"Yes, but the thing they are excited about now is a shop."

"A mohalla quarrel, I suppose–property. Last time I was there the *raises* got up a dummy scrap. A and B, hated rivals, you know, both wanted funds, so they hunted together–a common ruse. First they faked a quarrel. Then the delegates from both sides went round to the bazars and told the shopkeepers there was going to be a scrap that night–'a big thing this time.' They advised them to have a guard and of course, offered to supply it. The merchant is in for it either way. If he doesn't pay for the guard his shop is looted and the *rais* comes round in the morning and says, 'I told you so.'"

This story was illuminating. Not only did it give me a clue to the inwardness of the Shusteri, it explained his physical appearance–that perched, perky, bird-like look about him which makes you think he is going to hop, not alertly but deliberately, like one of his house-top storks.

I know nothing about Shuster. I do not pretend to understand it. I carried away suggestions, not facts. But the place gave me the idea that an Englishman, a man who could speak Persian well and had a sense of humour and was "not incurious in God's handiwork," might spend many days in the garden city of Khuzistan and not be bored.

END NOTES:

1. Mr. David Fraser, "*Turkey and Persia in Revolt.*"
2. The vaulted underground chamber to which the Persian retires in the heat of the day.

8

THE OLD BAGHDAD-KERMANSHAH ROAD

I

Nature has provided only one real road into Persia from the west. It has been trodden by soldiers, merchants and pilgrims for twenty centuries and no doubt it was a thoroughfare long before the origin of script. In ancient times it was the Babylon-Ecbatana road; it was known to Semiramis; it formed the boundary between Media and Assyria; the armies of Darius, Hytaspes, Cyrus and Khusru Parvis passed along it in the ebb and flow of conquest; the Mongols invaded the south by it, the Arabs the north; Harun-al-Rashid was familiar with it; from early Muhammadan days it became the great pilgrim route from Persia to the shrines of Kerbela, Najaf and Kazimain; and soon after the British entered Baghdad a column was sent along it to cut off the Turks who were falling back before the Russians from Hamadan. It is now the line of communications for our troops on the Persian border and members of the Expeditionary Force will remember it with thankfulness as the one road of escape from the desert to the hills.

One has to cover nearly sixty miles of the blank emptiness which is Mesopotamia before one gets a glimpse of the upland country in the Jebel Hamrin foothills. At Baquba, where one crosses the Diala, there are palm groves of almost Malayan luxuriance; but when one leaves it behind, the unrelieved desolation is repeated until one comes to Shahraban, another palm-girt, canalised town. Trees are abandoned here until one reaches Kizil Robat, twenty miles on; but four miles beyond Shahraban, on the banks of the Ruz Canal, one comes to stone. This is at the foot of the Jebel Hamrin under the pass. I had not seen so much as a pebble in Mesopotamia since we landed at Basra nearly eighteen months before. After this stone and wood, without which earth can arrive at very little in the way of feature or architectural design, become more frequent. Stone, even rock, abounds, but a tree is still a rarity.

I doubt if a traveller entering Jebel Hamrin from the north would think these hills beautiful. They are stark and naked and except for two months in the spring there is nothing virginal about them. Nor are they impressive. In outline they offer that uniform repetition of feature you find in all hot lands, a tired and disciplined symmetry with no willfulness in it—so many hooded cowls in a row, so many spines and spurs and reentrants like diagrams in a school book, no earth-born castles or rocks

"fantastically set
with cupola or minaret."

Anywhere else Jebel Hamrin might stand for the very prose and geometry of hills. The range is lifted a bare four hundred feet above the plain and is quite devoid of grandeur or design. But sublimity is relative. To us a corner or screen of rock behind which anything could hide contained a mystery. The broken ground was the old sea margin: it made all the difference. Hitherto we had trodden the alluvial silt where flowers did not grow or grew unwillingly. Here there were flowers—the homely buttercup, veronica, char-lock, cranesbill, pimpernel, clover, vetch, dandelion and fields of iris and red anemone.

The first action we fought at Jebel Hamrin, in the third week of March, 1917, was a sanguinary affair. The Turks held us back on the hills when they were crossing the Diala with the Russians behind them and as we imagined, pressing them hard. The Turkish gunners had the range of us and we learnt the difference between the burst of a shell on hard rock and soft soil. Also the warren of low hillocks was so complicated that one never knew if one were on dead ground or not. In places where one thought one was under cover one drew machine-gun fire and most of the little passes between one low ridge and another were traps. I remember a patch of open ground between rock which a sniper had marked for his preserve.

There was a bush of some blue leguminous plant just where one reached cover the other side and the impulse to recross was irresistible. The relief to be out of the flat was so great that the actual hills and the birds and the flowers and the gravel and rock interested me more at the time than the business that had brought us there. These were no doubt the preoccupations of a trivial mind, but one consoled oneself with the thought that the covetousness and intrigues or the honest instinct for survival, which had sent armed bodies of men through these passes for the last two thousand years were merely transient, whereas the hills in their stark nakedness or dainty covering were eternal. I have no doubt there were renegades in the armies of the Chosroes who botanised in a battle. Nobody bothers much now which side did the most killing, but the iris and the mauve hyacinth and the red anemone still blossom under Jebel Hamrin.

The streams were white with water-buttercup and their banks starred with English flowers. As the vicious little shrapnel burst over us I felt the senselessness of war more than I had done for a whole year. In these iris fields I had almost forgotten we were fighting. The great objective had been grasped and left behind. None of us could have felt very warlike. A blue sky, willows, a running stream, an English spring, banks bright with charlock, buttercups, clover, veronica, pim-pernel, scarlet anemones glowing through the grass; beyond the stream a plain rolling up to a scalloped ridge of rocks; beyond this again, forty miles or more, the snows and every promise of a flowering undulating country in between. It seemed hard on our men to have to go on attacking entrenched positions after a lull like this. War carried out of the accursed dead plain, where it had become a normal kind of hell, into this green spot, seemed less a phase, more an eternal fact, than ever.

A day or two after the battle the Turks effected their crossing of the Diala. They had been too strong for us to dislodge with our two brigades. Then, on April 2, we met the Cossacks at Kizil Robat. A single squadron had ridden in without transport or supplies. It was a hurried meeting and they left the same night, for we could neither of us stretch our line of communications far enough to keep up contact. But I was to meet them afterwards at Mendali and again at Kasri-Shirin. During the summer the force that formed our right flank stayed at Baquba, then in October we advanced again and there was a second battle of Jebel Hamrin. This was a bloodless affair. The Turks' position lay across the Khanikin road and along the Jebel Hamrin ridge, on both banks of the Diala. Our plan was to round him up by a huge converging movement. While our columns pressed in on his right, left and centre, our cavalry was to work round from Mendali in the rear of his position and cut off his retreat along the Khanikin road. All these movements were carried out like clockwork, without a hitch. Everyone was in the right place at the right time. Only our net closed in on emptiness. The Turk had slipped away in the night and crossed the Diala. The smoke of trains—for by this time the railway had followed us—and the dust of innumerable convoys had warned him. We had put a Nasmyth hammer in motion to crush a grasshopper. That to the civilian mind is exactly how battles ought to be fought. We showed our hand and the Turk threw down his on the table. He took off his hat to us and departed, leaving us the position. It was a very gentlemanly affair and nobody was much hurt. I think our casualties on the left bank were six.

These operations took place in the third week of October and I did not expect to find flowers; but, as if to prove the catholic virtue of the soil, the fields by the Ruz Canal under Table Mountain were covered with autumn crocuses. The Turks had really quitted this time and we were able to explore the gorge in peace where the Diala forces its passage through the hills. Here it is a river of singular beauty. The blue water flows between cliffs of the steep red rock which gives its name to the range. "Hamrin" in Arabic is the feminine plural of the adjective *ahmar*, red. The rock is red sandstone and the redness lightens and deepens continually with sun and cloud, from the red of old brick to the pink of the inside of a shell washed up by the tide. In the soft evening light I have seen the whole range as pink as the walls of Jaipur.

Six weeks later we were engaged on Jebel Hamrin again. This time operations were on the right bank of the Diala and in a three days' battle we cleared the ridge, drove the Turks over the Sakal Tutan pass down into the Qara Tappah plain and pursued them over the Nahrin River and the undulating spurs beyond until they melted away in the neighbourhood of

Kifri on the Mosul road. On the second morning after the night march we looked down over a vast stretch of country from the Sakal Tutan pass. The white wisps of dust in the distance, like the smoke of camp-fires, were the Turks we had dislodged the day before trekking over the plain to take up their new position in the next range; and the long grey caterpillar on the flank, with its sparkle of a helio like a glistening dewdrop, was one of our columns converging on them from the Diala. This manoeuvre battle in the hills was in the old style and I think nearly every one enjoyed it. I was reminded of Tibet. We covered nearly forty miles of strange country and never knew where we were going to camp or how, far the pursuit was to be pushed; and it was over alternating hill and plain—mostly the kind of high gravelly down on which you would expect to see marmots. This was in November. Six months afterwards, in May, 1918, when the grass was deep and the hollyhocks glowed in the corn and the great rhubarb-like glossostemon was a feature in the landscape, I was with the cavalry 120 miles north-west of Jebel Hamrin, in the high plateaux of Southern Kurdestan. We drove the Turks out of Kifri and Kirkup and pursued them as far as Altun Kupru, on the banks of the Lesser Zab.

It was not until the first week of January, 1918, that I had the chance of following the Baghdad-Kermanshah road into Persia, as far as the watershed of the Zagros range, a few miles above Kerind. I went with an escort to bring back the wireless detachment, who had been with the Cossacks the best part of a year in Kermanshah. As we went north we saw whiter sheep and earlier grass. The same rolling gravelly downs extended from Kizil Robat to Khanikin, the Turkish frontier town where the Alwand is crossed by a fine tenarched bridge. The actual frontier is crossed some nine miles farther on and one does not come on relics of the hungry generations that trod one another down on the road between Babylon and Ecbatana until one reaches Kasri-Shirin, the first town across the border. It is a picturesque little mountain town and spreads itself out above the Alwand River and under an old stone castle on a hill. The palms of Baquba, Shahraban, Kizil Robat and Khanikin give place to willows—a sign that one has left the sub-tropical deserts behind. North of the town one passes a wall of cyclopean masonry twelve feet high, where it touches the road, built of hewn stone and mortar or cement. The thought of a castrum as the Roman origin of Kasri leapt to one's mind. But the place is Sassanian. The foundations of the palace and the fort and the walls of the park cover many square miles. Within this enclosure were the gardens of Khusru Parvis and Shirin, his beautiful, devout and accomplished queen, the Christian woman who played polo and founded churches and monasteries; and it is from Khusru and Shirin that the town derives its name. On the other side of the river there is a rainbow formation in the rock, one arc behind another in tiers of three, purple in the centre, white above and a dark mulberry tint beneath. The cliffs beyond were coated with a purplish red like sea-wrack and their rocky bases, glistening in the rain, looked as if the ebbing tide had just left them. One might search for the rainbows another day and not find them, for the colours were constantly changing. The red sea-wrack faded to a dull lichen hue as I watched it. In feature and colour it is a rich country for the sun and cloud to play on and the hillside where the ancient palace stood was a natural throne for the Chosroes.

At Kasri-Shirin I met the Cossack Partizanski again. Bicharakoff, who commands them, is the only man I know who after three and a half years' war still loves fighting. He comes of an old Asetin stock, wears no decorations and has the face of an iron dreamer. He was on the Russian western front early in the war and has been wounded six times in six different actions. He has lost the use of his right hand, retains only partial use of his left and carries a bullet near his spine and limps. All the same he is a hard rider and when mounted you could not tell he was not sound. I met him first eight months after the revolution, when Bolshevism was beginning to rear her ugly head. His detachment of picked regulars, volunteers from the different regiments on the Caucasian front, were for carrying on. They waived "their rights as free citizens" to break their faith, desert their allies and return to their homes. It was at Mendali that I first ran into them, a small Kurdish town three miles from the Persian frontier on the borders of Luristan. They had pitched their camp on the edge of an oasis between walled clumps of palm and poplar where the desert meets the hills.

Bicharakoff was bound now for the Caspian, whither I could not follow him, as operations were pending nearer Baghdad; but it was good to see the black flag of the Partizanski again and the skull and crossbones on the pennants of the squadron commanders, white on a black field with maroon edges, the die-hard, war *a l'outrance* sign. On the Partizanski flag the Scotch thistle and English rose were embroidered with the Russian bear—a design of the English ladies of Kermanshah—and the motto in Russian—"Nemo me impune lacessit." The thistle was for Leslie and his cadet son and the Scotch adjutant, Gowans. Leslie, who spoke no word of English and only a word or two of French, had been in exile, as he put it, for over three hundred years. An ancestor came over in Queen Mary's time to train Ivan's cavalry and his family had been in Russia ever since. There was no outward trace of the Scot in him and he did not wear his nationality on his sleeve. I think my orderly, a man of the Sea-forths, was the first Highlander in uniform he had met. He had read of the pipes, he told me, in his family records, but it was at Mendali, on the inhospitable borders of Luristan, that he heard the music of them for the first time and it was a Punjabi piper who piped the Cossacks in.

The Partizanski rode in singing their Russian part songs, a deep-toned chant, the sergeant-major of each sotnia conducting with his whip. They were greeted by the hurrahs of the British soldiers and the Muhammadan sepoys and the war cries of the Jats and Sikhs; when the Sikhs broke in with their "Wah Guru ji ka khalsa! Wah Guru ji ki fatteh!" the Cossacks broke off their song and cheered. As the infantry filed into camp with their long bayonets fixed in Russian fashion the piper of the Punjabi battalion, a pupil of the drum major of the Black Watch, strode backwards and forwards playing each company in to the tune of "The Campbells are Coming," "Scotland the Brave," and the regimental slogan, "Hot Punch." And the Russian Colonel, Leslie, hearing his native pipes for the first time, nearly wept.

At Kasri-Shirin Bicharakoff rode at the head of his Cossacks in black. His staff wore the varied uniforms of the different regiments from which they were drawn. The sotnias followed singing, then the infantry and after it the ambulance, the sick in doolies with long poles attached to ponies fore and aft and the three hospital ladies, one a Russian princess, riding behind. The transport, hired Persian mules and ponies, lent colour to the column; nearly every beast had a large brass bell hanging from its neck and a broad necklace of cowries and beads. And, as if there were some outlandish element lacking in the procession, as if the Kurdish drivers with their apple-red cheeks, variegated cloths, round coal-scuttle felt hats tilted backwards and bound with bright scarves, did not lend colour enough, there must needs enter in the saffron-canopied palanquin of some Christian bishop from Urmiah way. I forget his episcopal title and whether he was Armenian, Nestorian, Chaldaean or what. He was known in the force that night as "the Archi-Mandrake," and in the morning he disappeared, his errand a mystery.

After dark there was a good deal of horse-play. Two of the Cossacks dressed up as a camel, sharing extremities, a third as an Arab driver. The beast gurgled and bubbled and swayed its neck to bite and knelt down very realistically—a thread-bare joke in the Caucasus, yet crowds of delighted Cossacks followed the show all over the camp. The Indians were drawn in; a ring was formed; the ground cleared between two swinging lamps. First the Cossacks danced. Then the Bangaish sepoys of the Punjabi battalion gave us the *wild* Khattak dance of the North-West Frontier, swinging swords and leaping Dervish fashion. The Cossacks cried "Musik! Musik!" and the Punjabi piper came in with "The Deil is in the Kitchen," which started them off dancing again. A sepoy, wrapping a towel round his head to imitate a nautch girl, gyrated solemnly round the ring; and intermittently the dozen or so British soldiers contributed items of the Gaff—not that there was any particular talent in the camp, but because they felt "it was up to them," and the last thing we heard in the rain as we turned in was the chorus of "Keep the Home Fires Burning."

II

On the road to Seri Pul the next morning we passed four of the round Persian watch-towers, all standing on hills where the road could be best ambushed and enfiladed—at "the place of thieves," or "cut-throat pass," or "the gorge that destroys horses' shoes." They stood out so boldly and in such desolation that one would have pulled out one's "slug-horn," if one had one and blown lustily at them. The pilgrim traffic had ceased since the beginning of the war. Even in the least pious years 50,000 used to pass along this road to Kerbela and many corpses for burial in the holy places and the revenue from the traffic was high both in Kermanshah and Khanikin.

The passage of pilgrims explained the spaciousness of the Khans or Serais. Coming back in the flood and rain the whole force put up in the two Khans at Seri Pul—the Hampshires, the Persian gendarmerie, the machine-gun company, the ambulance, the Sappers and Miners with a few motors and some transport in one Khan and the mountain battery and cavalry in the other. In the outer alcoves or cubicles, you found odds and ends like horses, mules, drabies, cooks, Persian gendarmes, Kurdish drivers, staff officers, interpreters; and in the wide inner vaulted corridors which had stabled the cavalry of Shah Abbas in Queen Elizabeth's days, the whole of the Hampshire battalion, the hospital, signalled, sappers and machine-gun company.

The country was rich enough in peace time to support its own population and the hundred thousand pilgrims who used the road; but when we passed through it was desolate. It was not a case of mere ravage, but of almost complete denudation. Standing crops had been burnt and granaries destroyed, so that there was no seed for the next harvest. Khanikin was half demolished, Kasri-Shirin a waste and the rich fields of Seri Pul lay fallow; the village and Khan were deserted. Five armies had passed through in eighteen months, Cossack and Turk, living on the country and destroying everything. Trees had been felled, solid roofs broken up and rafters and doors torn away for firewood. Hearths lay open to the wind and weather. The great gateway of the Khan at Seri Pul had been consumed in campfires. The few inhabitants that had been left in the villages by the roadside were ragged, starved and miserable and begged piteously for food.

On the way back two young Kurds, of good physique, but wasted, came to us in the gateway of the Khan at Seri Pul and begged for bread. We gave them each a couple of ration biscuits. The next day we met them on the road. They had gone twenty miles stumbling through the rain and the dark. One lay dead by the roadside, the other stood over him and called to us as we passed. He begged us to take the corpse in the motor. It was impossible. In peace time, perhaps, two of us might have walked and given our seats to the corpse and its guardian. But in war one does not do these things: the calls for relief are too many. The old standard of charity would immobilise one, though I do not think one is less sensitive to suffering because of one's daily contact with it. When we refused, the man offered us a small piece of silver, the value of fourpence. Then he pointed to the sky and wept and called upon Allah. "Sahib! Sahib! to Kasri-Shirin!" he wailed after us and the throb of the engine drowned his sobs. I hoped that one of the empty ambulances that were following would take him up, but I felt his reproachful eyes in the small of my back for miles.

In Khanikin the next day I saw an emaciated old woman, all skin and bones, being bled by a leech. She did not look as if she had any blood in her, but a stream poured out of her arm that would have filled a small jug. The leech picked up a lump of the filthy trodden bazar clay and clapped it on the wound. The woman carefully extracted a small copper piece from a bag and gave it to him. He took it grumblingly and she tottered away. The bleeding may have been a normal operation in Khanikin, resorted to as in the days of our grandfathers, as a salve to a dozen different kinds of distress; but the shadow of starvation was so palpable everywhere that I was afraid the old lady might have thought she would be less hungry after she had been bled. The same day a driver told me that he and a corporal had been attacked by two Kurds, who were unarmed and were evidently driven to it by hunger, thinking that they might find food on the motor. Our men hammered them and then fed them. It was a relief to hear that we were sending rice into Khanikin.

We approached Pai Taq, the village at the foot of the pass, in stormy weather. Everyone was very much struck with the scenery. Perhaps we exaggerated the grandeur of it. After a year on the Tigris flat one might discover sublimity in a railway embankment. Mist always magnifies things. The dark blanket of cloud hanging over the bluff headlands made them look immense. Then the storm, the rainbow, the intermittent shafts of light irradiating promontories, the red halo thrown on the cliffs at sunset, transfigured everything. There were splashes of autumn colouring on mountain and plain, the foxy red of the osiers and the tawny rushes in the Alwand stream under the rock wall and the russet oak scrub on the hillsides. The pass is approached by a clear-cut outer gate in the immediate foothills. One enters by a broad, sweeping avenue of plain between two great walls of rock which close and regally usher one in. The ancient pomp of Persia seems to have been preserved in these hills. As they entered the pass the home-returning soldiers of Xerxes, Darius and the Chosroes must have compared the majesty of their own land with the poverty in design of the territories they had been overrunning. Pai Taq and Kasri-Shirin were the thresholds of a kingdom whose people would naturally be conquerors.

Yet the Sassanidac came down to Ctesiphon, a land fertile in crops in those days, but sterile in beauty and in respect to climate thinly partitioned from hell. For thousands of years the Kings of the earth chose to live in Mesopotamia. I have never understood why Nebuchadnezzar and his like were content with their firepit in Babylon when they might have seated their majesty on a natural throne in the hills. Nebuchadnezzar, speaking in the bricks of a protective wall he built on the Euphrates, says: "I raised its foundations on the depth of the water, its top I exalted like the wooded mountains." He was familiar, it seems, with the existence of hills. He might have lived in Kermanshah and farmed and colonised the plain. Or he might have had a summer palace in the Pusht-i-Kuh or in Lebanon when it was really a forest and the camel convoys of Babylon carried the sweet-scented timber over the desert of Palmyra to the temple of Marduk at Esagila. But he lived in Babylon because he loved it. He went on repairing and extending the city because it was already immense. "Because my heart did not wish the dwelling-place of my majesty to be in another place, because I did not build a royal dwelling in any other place and because I did not consign the kingly property to all lands, my dwelling-place in Babylon grew insufficient for the dignity of my majesty"; because he only cared about "amazing the people" and being remembered for ever and therefore never knew the happiness of the camel-boy who brought the cedar-wood from Lebanon and who for one month in three breathed mountain air and trod on flowers. And because of the antiquity of his name and its inclusion in holy writ one is apt to forget that Nebuchadnezzar was a sad vulgarian, materialist and snob and that it was the most perfect piece of poetic justice in the Bible that he should have been made to eat grass—the grass of Babylon and not of Kermanshah.

The Taq-i-Garra Pass (5,200 feet) is only steep on the west side. One mounts nearly 1,500 feet in two and a half miles, passing the Taq, a massive arch of marble, the wayside resting-place for travellers and pilgrims which gives the village and the pass their name. The origin of the Taq is clouded in legend, but one likes to think that Khusru used to rest there with his Shirin and water his black horse Shabdiz. After the first ascent the gradient is easy for another eleven or twelve miles; then the pass peters out into the high Persian plateau. I was determined to reach the watershed, but as luck would have it we met the wireless detachment in the middle of the pass and the column turned back. Things seemed pretty hopeless, but I managed to wheedle an escort out of the cavalry, a rissaldar and four sowars and was able to push on. First we met the advance guard of the mounted Persian gendarmerie in their black cloaks, then the Anzac detachment and their wireless carts drawn by six stout mules. Their faces were black with wind and weather and the white butterfly on their slouch hats faded to a lichen grey. At any ordinary time I should have pulled up and asked them how they had spent the winter in Kermanshah; but now I would not have stopped if I had met the holy carpet or Joan of Arc. It was getting late and it was not much more than an even chance whether I could reach the far end of the pass and get back by night. I met an officer who called back to me that he was at the end of the convoy. I explained that I was going to have a look at the pass. He shouted back, "Not worth it. A good six miles. No view. All like this." I thanked him and said I would go on a bit, but my silent comment was: View be d--d. One is not a Yankee collecting God Almighty's coloured posters.

No book or talk, eulogy or detraction, can explain a pass. Every pass has its own peculiar way of taking you through a mountain range and always something new to show you on the other side. It is the end of a scene, act or chapter and it does not matter whether it is bathos or climax or anything between so long as you wring its secret out of it. It clinches one experience and promises another. The physical effort in meeting the challenge and the mental suspense keep pace and honour and curiosity are satisfied at the same time. The maps that the wanderer carries in his head would have little colour in them if it were not for passes.

We rode on for ages. The narrow valley grew almost flat, but refused to become a watershed and the stream trickled the wrong way, the way we had come, feeding the Diala and ultimately the unlovely Tigris. I wanted a stream that fed something else.[1] But it seemed hopeless. One could not keep those sowars out till long after dark for a mere superstition.

But was it a superstition? I thought of the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin. A balked pass seemed the symbol of feebleness, incompleteness and indecision. It is as bad to turn from a pass when one has set one's face to it as it is to turn one's back on an unbeaten enemy.

I asked the rissaldar if he had ever been in snow. He told me that he had seen it, but that he had never touched it. One got a glimpse of it, he said, on clear days in the Himalayas from his village near Lala Musa in the Punjab. I told him that in half an hour we should be treading it. It was a happy thought, as it gave us a common objective. Till then I had been depressed by the feeling that I was merely the occasion for a "fatigue." But the rissaldar, like nearly all sepoys, was a responsive fellow and seemed quite to enter into the spirit of the search for actual snow. We came to some level stretches, not too stony for a canter and so we put a mile or two behind us; but the stream refused to dwindle and persisted in flowing the wrong way.

We had nearly reached the hour and the minute which I had fixed as the obligatory limit to our adventure, when a turn gave us a low horizon, which seemed to be literally dropping away. I felt that this was no illusion and an old blackened guard-house, such as stands at all entrances and exits on these frontiers, doubled my assurance. We galloped over the peaty turf and saw the stream swinging down on us from a lateral ravine. We reached the wall. In front there was no wild drop falling away. Instead, we stood on the high brown Persian plateau, girt with low mulberry-coloured hills.

The Taq-i-Garra leads up to the tableland. The rissaldar remarked it. He said that he had never seen a pass before which was all ascent and no decline. But the snow was there. It had fallen appropriately on the spot. I ate some, gulping down a libation to the mountains and a prayer that I might never spend another summer in the Mesopotamian plain. Then I showed the rissaldar how we made snowballs in England and he pelted the sowars. They were enjoying it. Before we mounted I saw the youngest of them, grinning self-consciously, fill his horse's nosebag with snow, to carry away as testimony of the adventure to unbelieving bhais. An unsympathetic escort would have spoilt it. As it was, I felt as pleased as if we had won another battle.

We got back soon after dark and a staff officer asked me if I had had a good view. I told him that there was not much of a view, so I suppose he took it that our labour was wasted. However, he agreed that it must have been homely to be in snow again. The snow in the pass and the unexpected brown tableland and the crisp russet leaves of the oak, were very homely. The dead leaves were clinging to the bough in the same obstinate way they have through the long winter in English lanes and copses; and when you crushed them they emitted the same delicious dank smell. And I was glad to have seen the central tableland. Before that my wanderings had only touched the glacis, as it were, of Persia. I had a picture now of the kind of country that repeats itself in parallel strips of ridge and plain right up to where the northern rampart falls away in forest-clad slopes to the shores of the Caspian. Memories of passes like the Taq-i-Garra, the Khyber and the Nathu-la, so different in what they divulge, convert the atlas from a mere book of reference to a handbook of romance.

III

I was offered the chance of returning with the Persian gendarmerie from Kasri-Shirin to Kermanshah, but I decided to wait until the spring, when the hills would be covered with flowers. On April 10 I was in Jebel Hamrin. It was a late summer. The hills were a blaze of colour. The scarlet anemone (*Anemone coronaria*) in the folds of the gravel grew as thick as poppies in the corn and the fields of wild barley whitened like the under-fur of an animal stroked by the cool hand of the wind. At Pai Taq I explored the gorge under the pass. The Alwand disdains steps or gradients and makes its descent into the lower valley in two bold leaps. I have never seen anything more sudden or final than the end of the gorge or more studiedly architectural. One could imagine it built by the master mason of some Achemaean or Sassanian king, a piece of landscape gardening in the paradisus of Artaxerxes.

You stand in an arched chamber and look up through the broken roof to the blue sky and the little fringing trees on the edge of the cliff overhanging the upper bed of the stream. The huge grotto is so walled and roofed that no breeze can enter it from the east or west or north—only the perpetual cool draught of air that is flung outward by the fall. The upper valley is hidden. You can only see the last two leaps of the torrent, first where it plunges from an invisible channel on to a platform of rock worn by the water into a basin, the kind of Triton reservoir into which architects aspire to confine a cascade before it is released in falls on to the terraced gardens underneath. The water is held here and collects for its last plunge where it tumbles from the centre of the rim of the basin, a solid column dear of the rock, into the green pool below. The cliffs on both sides are overhanging and the rock is hollowed away behind the fall so that this almost complete vault is repeated in diminishing tiers like the segments of a spiral. The pool is deep and bow-shaped and the water gathers again for its quiet discharge by a natural conduit in the centre corresponding to the lip of the basin above. After this it resumes the waywardness of a mountain stream, but its fall is the most ordered and symmetrical I have seen, very beautiful without being wild and quite Persian in its inspiration. If not the fall of the Alwand, it must have been some such natural cascade that inspired the first Persian landscape gardener with the traditions that one finds expressed in every walled pleasaunce from Azerbaijan to Kashmir. It may have been fancy, but I thought I found a certain formalism in all Persian scenery consistent with one's early conceptions of the country. On every march one is conscious of being in a land which was the nursery of poets, kings, fountains, palaces and pride, the origin of nearly everything that is decorative in the near and middle East.

There was only wanting some bright formal plant to complete the sense of design appropriate in a garden of the Chosroes. It was too early in the year for the path that led to the grotto to have a border of any kind; but by a strange coincidence I found my first wild tulips *(Tulipa montana)* there. This most formal of flowers is not likely to be a favourite with wanderers who do not know it wild. One thinks of it as rather a bourgeois plant, the habitue of public gardens and florists' windows. One owes it the same kind of debt as one owes a municipality and remembers that its bulbs are imported by the gross from the Dutch. It is a privileged plant and one associates it with tailors' bills. But a red, crinkly-leaved, upright tulip in the Zagros is a different thing. At the first sight of it any silly prejudice one may have felt against the family is dissipated forever, just as a democrat's intolerance of dandies is forgotten when he discovers how well the genus shapes in a campaign.

Oddly enough, the rough formalism which I had discovered or imagined in Persian landscape was repeated in Kerind, the first town beyond the Taq-i-Garra pass. Kerind fills the mouth of the gorge where the Ab-i-Kerind flows out into the plateau. It is built in two perfect lunettes, bi-sected by the stream and spreading fanwise on each bank. The curtain of splintered rock behind, with ribs as symmetrical as vertebrae, is divided into two sweeping arcs, like the town, which is the same colour as the cliff, with its apex wedged deep in the gorge. Behind this romantic cleft the orchards stretch a mile. The apricots, almonds, apple, cherry, peach, were in blossom. Everything was in the same stage as in an early April season at home. There were banks of violets, grape-hyacinths, celandines, dandelions in flower. The catkins were on the willows. The leaf-buds of the walnuts and of the delicate, upright, white-stemmed poplars that lined the water-cuts had not emerged. Last year's dead leaves and seeds clung to the briar. It was a much more English flora than you will find in southern Europe.

The Serai and outskirts of the town adjoining the road had been destroyed. The place was in the grip of famine. The streets were strewn with the shells of acorns which the Kerindis were bringing down from the Zagros and eating raw or grinding into flour. Scattered over the plateau one saw thin black figures gathering herbs or searching the road for grain or oats, collecting single ears dropped from the horses' nose-bags where the cavalry or transport had fed or dissecting offal for undigested grain. Some of these groups of two or three made me think of the Angelus picture. It was the spiritual antithesis of Millet's vision. The peasants, as they ceased their plucking of herbs to watch us pass, were standing in the same arrested way, only with this difference: it was a reaping of weeds instead of corn; instead of promise, hope, fulfilment, faith and the confident repose in a loving and watchful God, there was hopelessness, denial, unbelief, no sign or encouragement to believe, only the heedless elements and the slow torpor ending in death.

We had started relief work on the road and were able to feed a thousand or so, but we could not command corn enough to affect more than the margin of distress and money was of little use when prices were so high. Nearly every man, woman and child begged food of us. Their skeleton frames and the dead we passed on the road were more eloquent than their cries of "Where is your charity?" We gave what we could spare, but in most cases we could not give. The eyes of the dying pierced the small of our backs like gimlets as we left them behind; their voices followed us calling out of the abyss. And we passersby excused our helplessness, saying, "We cannot be their providence." "What is the use of a loaf of bread among so many?" "It is no good feeding this woman or child; it only means they will die the day after tomorrow instead of today, a few more hours of wretchedness." Yet inwardly we were feeling that any starving soul we left to die was a personal reproach. The fate of a thousand others did not affect our relations with the particular man. It was a case between us and him—a strong man with food and money and a weak man with nothing and the hunger we could satisfy by giving away part of our possessions, submerging him inch by inch, hour by hour creeping over him as insidiously and irresistibly as the tide. If one put oneself in the starving man's place one saw the dreadful logic of this. Does one let a man sink within reach of one's hand because a number of others are drowning? In the agony of every voice and gesture this question was implicit.

Up to Pai Taq conditions were better than they had been in January, owing to the supplies we were able to send along the road, but we were entering a zone which could depend on no relief other than what we could bring it. Some of our troops had orphans with them, whom they had picked up lying beside the bodies of fathers and mothers who had died by the roadside. "John Hampshire," a typical little Kurdish brat, under five, cheery and rotund, with a perpetual smile and a paunch that denied want, used to come into mess after dinner and light our cigarettes and amuse himself with us in as full a measure as we were amused with him.

After Kerind things became worse and one could think of nothing else but the general want. Persia had been visited by a drought in 1917. Districts untouched by war were famine-stricken. In Teheran alone, according to the statistics of the local newspapers, 40,000 had died before the end of March. In Hamadan, the Persians told me, they were eating human flesh; only the dogs and nature's other professional scavengers were strong; they and the children fought for carrion by the roadside. In the province of Kermanshah, at ordinary times the richest grain-producing land in Persia, now wasted for three years by Cossack and Turk in alternate advance and retreat, there was little hope that the needier part of the population could hold out until the harvest.

The capital of the province lies some fifty miles by road north-east of Kerind and one crosses three passes of over 5,000 feet on the way—the Nil Sikhan (5,350 feet), the Charzowar (5,360 feet) and the Ainal Kush (5,350 feet). From the Ainal Kush one looks down upon the plain of Kermanshah. The city is spread on two low hills commanding one of the grandest panoramas in Persia. Five miles to the north, across a gently swelling plain, rise the foundations of the massif that culminates in Perau (10,470 feet) and breaks off abruptly to the east in the sheer rock face of Bisotun. Deep gorges penetrate it, the home of ibex and the country of those unassailable robber tribes the Pairawand and Kuliai. To the west, following a branch of the Kara Su, winds the road to Suleimania and Kurdistan; to the east, under the sculptured bluff of Bisotun, the road to Hamadan and the Caspian, with branches striking off to Ispahan, Tabriz and Teheran. The great beauty of these mountains of the plateau is that one can comprehend their whole anatomy at a glance. Their approaches are not, hidden or confused by lesser hills or broken ground. Perau and Bisotun stand boldly on their foundations, the sweeping plateau is their threshold; their troubled summits are set off by the repose of the plain. This does not enhance their mystery or wildness; it lends their mountain spirit an added symmetry and grace. It is the formalism of Persian landscape again. The hills owe to the soft lines of the plateau what the diamond owes its foil.

We descended the pass in a break of the storm. Fresh snow lay on the ranges all round and the vivid green of the crops in the valley of the Kara Su promised a rich harvest. If only the people could hold out another three months there would be no more want. The gardens behind the town winding up the banks of the stream into the hills, in one valley an uninterrupted stretch of four miles, were a shimmer of bloom, pink of apple and white of cherry, plum and pear. Orchards and vine-yards were mingled and fenced with the pale straight poplar which serves as timber and a screen against the wind. These valleys are what Ruskin would call "the wheat and grape lands": they are perennially watered by springs and if nature has her own way there need never be drought. The famine of 1917-18 was man's doing, a ripple of the universal death oozing from its fountain of envy and hate and pride in Berlin.

The plague and misery with which the Hun has infected the world is the more manifest the farther one gets from the hub of the evil. One expects the routine of hell at the source of pollution, in the Continent that conceived it. It is only when one finds the shadow of the angel of death flung over the mountains and deserts of Asia that one realises how complete is the sway of the devil raised in Potsdam. My first realisation of a famine on a wide scale was in the streets of Kermanshah. I was shocked to see a boy dead in the bazar. He was lying by the side of the road, his hands clutched and some horse grain sticking to his lips as if he had been unable to swallow his last meal. The bazars were crowded, but no one seemed to take any notice of him. A little farther on I passed another body of a young man, mere blotched skin and bone in loose rags. The crowd stepped to one side indifferently. There were children lying on skins in the mud crying piteously. I was told that it is a common trick of the Persian mendicant to put his children out like this to attract alms, also that they will borrow corpses to lay by their side on the road to excite pity. The professional beggar in Persia has studied the art of moving compassion in times of plenty; he is a realistic actor of a high order; his penetrating and distressing whine cuts like a jagged saw. Now the wolf was really at the door. You could see his ravages in every face. There was no pretence. The large troop of professional beggars was swelled by the whole of the poorer part of the population. Twenty or thirty died in the streets every day uncared for by their own people and many lay dead in the houses. There was a public scavenger who collected the bodies in the evening and threw them into the pit outside the city. The law of the jungle held in Kermanshah. When the hunger gripped a family the husband would sometimes turn his wives and children into the street or abandon his home himself. The weakest went to the wall. I was changing some rupee notes at a money-changer's and gave a keran to a starved woman who was standing by. Four other women were on her like vultures, tearing at her hands and dress, howling and sobbing in a frightful way. I saw another woman, not strong enough to protect herself, buy a fold of bread at a stall; it was dragged from her and torn to strips like meat thrown to animals. One seldom saw a face with any happiness in it or health or pity and one felt that the most merciful thing that could befall Kermanshah would be an earthquake or some such swift Biblical visitation.

We must have saved thousands at Hamadan, Kerind and Kermanshah by relief work on the roads. At Kermanshah we bought a large stock of grain that the Russians had left behind and distributed it. When the American Mission first gave away food to the Kermanshahis, the mob rushed them and got in behind the store, lusty young fellows elbowing the women and children aside and falling on the bread like wolves. The missionaries had to throw it over the heads of the strong to the weak; but this set the pack doubling back again and there was nothing to do but to beat them off. "One cannot feed men with one hand and beat them with another," a missionary lady explained; yet it was done and discipline introduced, by sending them empty away at the next muster.

There was food in Kermanshah for those who could afford it and many of the people were well-to do; but they seemed incapable of pity or any disinterested act. Our own motives were suspected. I think they regarded our relief work as a political move: they believed we were making capital out of the people's distress, which, no doubt, seemed to them a very natural thing to do. So in Teheran, when the English ladies established kitchens and fed the famine-stricken, the papers were sarcastic, saying, "The British are cunningly seeking to glorify themselves." To such intellectuals one prefers the wolfish pack. In Kermanshah I helped in the distribution of the first relief tickets. The weakest and most helpless and the least capable of work were the first to receive aid, but these were soon thrust aside and trampled on as the crowd surged in. At first one could do nothing. Infinite pity alternated with disgust. One was soon on the defensive with a whirling stick. Even so, one was robbed and looted. It was all very natural. Nothing counts with the starving but their desperate need. The animal is bound to emerge. In the bazars the pressure of the crowd and their cries brought on a dizziness and one walked in a dream and thought the people were dead and in hell—that one was oneself in hell, a spectator wandering among the damned, in nowise blessed for one's fortuitous immunity from their pain. Their ashen earthy faces stared up at one; their hands clutched at one's sleeve; their voices were more dreadful than their faces and hands. There was such a decay of body and mind everywhere—such humiliation of the flesh and despair of the spirit—that one could not conceive of any resurrection, any further punishment to come or breath of redeeming life to revive the dull spark in the clay.

The carnage of a battlefield has a touch of sublimity in it; but in famine there is no idealism, only a degradation, enforced and pitiless, a nakedness of despair which seems the negation of a watchful and interested God. And the fairer the scene the more pitiless is this seeming neglect. Here one saw in humanity a physical and moral hideousness, as if the Almighty had relegated man to the false gods he had established by choice, leaving him to find in them what help he could; while the One Spirit dwelt and breathed in the calm serenity of the snows, in the fruit trees whose pink-and-white blossoms fretted the sky, the fairest promise in nature and in the mountains spread all round in their strength and beauty and repose, the inscrutable manifestation of a Providence which may withhold its message or its meaning, but which cannot ultimately lie.

END NOTES:

1. It is not generally realised and I did not realise it at the time that the Ab-i-Kerind, the Kara Su and the streams one crosses for more than a hundred miles beyond the Taq-i-Garra pass ultimately feed the Tigris by the Kharkeh channel or lose themselves in the marshes about Hawizeh and that the real watershed, the last barrier to the gulf-seeking streams, lies between Kanvagar and Hamadan.

9

THE PIR PINJAL IN WAR TIME

I

THE more one saw of Mesopotamia the more one longed for flowers and green shade. During all the fighting and waiting from Sheikh Saad to Shumran, during all the shivering in the mud and sweltering in the sun and digging down to escape the hot flying dust, north by east of us stood the bold flank of the Pusht-i-Kuh, snow-capped from the winter rains to the first week in May and luring us with their deep gorges opening on to the plain. Up there one knew there must be flowers and meadows and trees and a favourite topic in the Sannaiyat trenches in the hot weather was the hill-station we were going to build in the Pusht-i-Kuh after the war. I once skirted the range in an aeroplane near enough to see the scrub oak. My pilot was a keen mountaineer and we were both consumedly homesick after this glimpse of our desires when we flew back to the dull monotonous dead flat by the Tigris.

I have shown how it was borne in on us more than once in Mesopotamia that altitude is life; how when we left the baked deltaic mud where for hundreds of square miles there was not a pebble or a tree save the unsatisfying date palm, we came to flowers. It was not a question of latitude, for we were no farther north; or of temperature, for the thermometer rose higher. It was mere soil and elevation and the little respite the shade of a cliff gives a plant in a day of fourteen hours of burning sun. Yet we were not a thousand feet above the sea.

Leave rules were generous in Force "D." In the hot weather most of us got off by relays to India and of course, one made straight for the hills. One had a full month and sometimes a few, days thrown in, between disembarking and embarking at Bombay. After Mesopotamia the joys of civilisation are sweet. Even a train journey across the plains in July is delightful; and no one who knows Kashmir grudges the fifty-one hours by rail to Rawal Pindi. The motor run of 160 miles through Murree and up the Jhelum valley to Baramula is good; and when one wakes up in the morning in a buttercup-field and mounts one's pony and turns his head up the bridle-path to Baramula, one recaptures the thrill one had as a boy on the first day of the holidays after the first term at school.

The air is fresh and cool. One rides over the low plateau up into the firs and cedars, dips again to a stream and up by a path like a steep English lane, where the wild roses fling their scent across the road. Then again to meadows and fields and villages where the walnuts and chinars throw a generous shade. After a hueless land of offence and negation it is difficult to say whether colour or smell or shadow or coolth or the coming back to long-forbidden familiar things pleases most. One is most sensible to the freshness of everything. It is the gentleness and sympathy in the touch of the mountain air that begets all the rest–the life, the colour, the green shade, the sweet smells. Where this gentleness is not, as in Mesopotamia, there is death. Delicacy of colour and form and texture is born of it. In the flax field by the side of the road you will find the gamut of blue–in the flax and the borage, both flowers that steep themselves in the sun, the lightest, clearest, filmiest blue of the iris of a young girl's eyes and the darkest blue of cobalt merging into purple. And the succory grows at the edge of the field as at home, nature's stock blue, the primal elemental blue, spread everywhere as it should be in the image of stars, colour and form, like youth and beauty in one mould.

I have often thanked God that I had a nodding unscientific acquaintance with plants as a boy, enough to tell the family of a flower at a glance without counting the stamens or dissecting it with a knife. This means that one finds old friends in mountains and meadows and woods all over the world and one is never bored on a journey. At every step pleasant images and memories arise, conjured up by shapes and smells. In half an hour on a Himalayan path one lives through many incarnations. Here is the pink lychnis that used to grow on the bank over the pool where one learnt to swim; the white dianthus that one found on the cliff where one first saw the sea; the yellow agrimony that grew behind the cricket field wall at school when strawberries were ripe. One is greeted by small obscure flowers that one has forgotten for years and meets again with a feeling like remorse the dwarf willow herb, the wayside verbena, the enchanter's nightshade and that pleasant prim flower with the prim name, Prunella Vulgaris or self-heal, which used to cover the path in a certain wood that led to a house of delight.

Soon the warmth has drawn out the smell of resin in the pine. Higher up in a clearing in the forest I dismounted and rolled on a bank of thyme with all the zest of a pony that has rejected its load, thyme

"That smells like dawn in Paradise."

I hoped the many thousands who had "gone west'' in France and Mesopotamia were smelling it; for Paradise, if it is to be satisfying, must be earthy at least in its flowers and smells. There must be wallflowers and willow-herb and thyme and meadowsweet in the Elysian fields; for these we could well spare "the ampler ether," "the diviner air," "the more pellucid streams." Plants of new design, unfamiliar hues and scents, with no grateful associations reminiscent of earth, can only live in a bad dream of Paradise. They could not proceed from the God who fashioned the primrose and the woodsorrel. If one believed in a divinity so dull to his good works one would be more afraid to die. For there can be nothing in the next incarnation half so good as the smell of hot thyme or the reek of a hayfield in this.

It caused some amusement among my friends in Gulmarg that a man released from Mesopotamia, with the comforts of civilisation spread before him, should choose to go off into the wilderness and live in tents. But I met old friends who were starting on a trek in the Pir Panjal and we carried a fair share of civilised comforts with us. Gulmarg lies in a cup and is divested of flowers. The marg itself is deformed; all of it that is not reserved for golf is covered with a warren of huts scattered haphazard like goods sheds in a station siding. The place reminded me of Gnatong in Sikkhim after military occupation. Yet if you go to the edge of the cup and look over you will see the best of Kashmir. The station does not spoil the Pir Panjal, fox it is only a caravanserai and there is little danger of it spreading. In half an hour's walk you have left it behind. In the whole of the range from the Banihal pass to the Jhelum River there is not another bazar or village on the marg level.

Mountain-lovers, who are not mountaineers, will return again and again to the Pir Panjal. It is the one range in the Himalayas where the mountain slopes are not always on end, where one can gallop over downs of close-bitten turf and through forest glades. The margs or meadows, lie on the northern side–open plots with a margin of trees through which one can look down on the golden valley of Kashmir. Riding through the dark forest one enters a clear marshy space of emerald green, the colour of seedling rice, often with a bright pool in it cumbered by fallen and rotting trees. The marg is sometimes a little garden, an acre or less, walled by pines; sometimes a stretch of a mile or two of open rolling down, covered with thyme and marjoram and eyebright. Nobody understands why the forest leaves these glades alone and does not encroach. In the summer the gujjars or herdsmen, gentle goat-like men with apelike ears, drive their sheep and cattle up to graze from May to September, ascending or descending to different altitudes as the sun or snow compels them. In most of the large margs one comes across their low huts of horizontal pine logs rudely laid one upon the other. These are deserted in the winter. Half the charm of camping in the range is that there are no recognised bridlepaths or stages. The gujjars only know their own grazing grounds and they will guide you from one to another, pointing out the fords in the grey-bouldered beds of the torrents where the rocks have been moved aside to give the herds a passage. This makes for desultory travel. One may start with half a dozen different objectives. If the weather holds, one is drawn up to the *nags* or mountain tarns or the jagged crest of the range where there are peaks for mountaineers –Tatakuti or the Darhwal Dome topping 15,500 feet. If one runs into persistent rain, one can plunge down into the plateaux of the Jhelum valley below the forest and the margs. Here one can generally count on sunshine and the delights of the most purely pastoral country in the Himalayas.

My own bent after the Tigris valley was pastoral, but the lady who had instigated the trek was for ascending. Alpine flowers were her hobby and I was content. The husband was all for easy stages. He admitted to me that he would have given ten pounds to be quit of the whole affair. Holiday and peace of mind to him meant golf and bridge and the daily newspaper interspersed with his particular research. Once a year he martyrised himself by going camping with his wife, who had the soul of an explorer. He always swore that he would not do it again and she always swore that she would not have him. But their ways were undivided. The fourth member of the party fell through.

II

On the first day of our travels the sun shone. We left Gulmarg to the west, descending 2,000 feet into the valley of the Ferozepore stream among larkspur and mallow and warm-scented scabious. The path beyond led up through forest margs, rounded a spur and emerged on the high sweeping downs that fell away from the main wall of the range. As we ascended, the whole forest, from 7,000 to 9,000 feet, was knee-deep in Jacob's ladder, as blue a carpet as the wild hyacinths

"That seem the heavens upbreaking through the earth," but a lighter, more cerulean blue.

The man was for camping by a ruined tower, an ancient robbers' stronghold, whence one could look down on these azure fields and through the pines on to the plain. He had a great sympathy with the camp-followers, the servants and ponymen who abhor altitude and to whose interest it is to halve stages. He was for heading for the valley, she for the hills. Having come to an attractive spot he was for pitching camp. "What could be better than this?" he called out to Diana. "A lovely little marg! your hard-driven slaves are tired." And he pointed out to her professorially the beauties of nature for which she had left a comfortable home—that golden hummock of buttercups—it was really ragwort—under; the dark firs, the long row of sentinel mullein—he called it yellow foxglove—ranging down the cliff to the stream. No one who cared about flowers, he argued, could leave the spot for the uncertain beauties beyond. And it was such a good vantage ground for retreat if it rained. We had left Gulmarg, the club, the hotel, only one short march behind.

Here the gujjars, observing a weakness in the will-to-progress of the party, came up and protested that beyond this spot there was no grass, no wood, no track, that other sahibs had camped here and that if he went on the ponies would all die. To which Diana in her buckskins made suitable reply. A little argument, a little coaxing, some delicate reproof, a few contemptuous words to the men; then she mounted and whipped her pony over the next knoll, down the dip, across the level plain and up the incline. Here she waited and watched under the past pines for the first signs of the movement she had kindled. Soon Azizeh, the tiffin-basket coolie, clad in faded indigo, would appear over the rise, followed by the man with the lamps and the toothless Ancient of Days with his staff and his look of centuries of slow resigned movement, imposed by some law which he was too gentle to resist. The caravan would slowly drag out its length again, tents and bedding, sky-pointing tables and chairs, valises, kerosene-oil tins, pots and pans, the husband somewhere among them planting the point of his Khud stick in the turf with each deliberate step, moving a little less resignedly than the Ancient of Days. He always yielded if there were a patch of blue or a ray of sun. His dallyings were only moves in the game, the assertion of a philosophy to which he must be consistent—in spirit even if he had abandoned it in fact. And so in a spirit of perverse banter he would coddle a malingerer, giving him his horse to ride and listen with assumed credulity to the pretexts of the ponymen. Yet every evening by six o'clock the woman had pitched her camp where she intended or not far short of it; and the man, once sedentary, was reconciled.

The first night out of Gulmarg we camped in the Vehinar marg among the junipers. Each low isolated patch was a flower-bed, bright with the purple spires of monkshood, the lovely white drooping columbine, the bluey-grey codonopsis, the branching yellow inula; the grey rock-beds of the little streams were avenues of the pink and red polygonum and the thyme and eyebright disputed the turf. At sunset Diana and I were drawn up the slope to the edge of the mountain a mile to the north and looked over. The whole valley of Kashmir was bathed in opal and amber and gold. But it was only for a few moments. The powers of darkness were getting the upper hand. The glow of silver on the Wular lake under Haramokh faded to a dull lead. Soon "the purpureal gleams" of Erebus had dispossessed all light and the thick blanket of cloud that had wrought the transformation was almost on our heads. We hurried back to the camp, little knowing that we had witnessed the last innings of the sun for five days.

By the camp fire, which the rain had not extinguished, we found the man happily smoking. He was always happy when the question of locomotion was in abeyance and he entertained us till late in the night with a flow of good talk. Anti-quarian, socialist, educationalist, economist, steeped in the classics, yet a contemner of our public schools, he carried an encyclopaedia in his head that would have weighed down another pack-pony if we had brought it in volume form. His wisdom was borrowed from life and contact with men as much as from books; and though an analyst of human nature, he was more in love with Psyche than psychology. He found neither in the mountains and our talk generally wandered far from the Pir Panjal.

The next day we crossed the Krag Nangal Pass in rain and camped at Toshmaidan. On the third morning the clouds were thick and lowering after heavy rain all night, but at ten o'clock the sun had lightened and almost penetrated the mist. We decided to go on, but it was twelve before the men had struck the tents and caught and loaded the ponies. A tall, dark, inarticulate gujjar of Toshmaidan, without a word of Hindustani, guided us up to a sort of tunnel under the clouds which we understood was the pass. The other side of this range, the main backbone of the Pir Panjal, there are a number of unvisited or rarely visited lakes, which Diana was anxious to explore. They appealed to her imagination, to her sense of adventure; they were the haunts of romance, the habitat of rare Alpine flowers, of late primulas and creamy saxifrage, of the blue corydalis and the great blue prickly poppy, which stands out of the rocks like a human figure visible across the valley. But the man cared nothing for wild vegetation. Even under a blue sky he preferred to imagine the poppies; on this grey morning his attitude was of a parent dutifully escorting a child to some display that left him cold. The higher we went, the farther we left loveliness behind and the gloomier was his spirit. My sympathies were divided. I had seen enough of desolation. It was not savagery in nature that I craved now. For two years I had been longing for the hills—but pastoral hills with flowers and grass and shadow of maple and scent of pine—not this naked playground of the elements. Yet I remembered the fascination of high altitudes. Diana, coming straight out of civilisation, desired the starkness that had once attracted me more than grass lands or forest; and I was with her in her feeling that this obstinate buttress of matter must be defeated at all costs. It requires courage in man or woman to turn one's back on a pass when one has set one's face to it.

As we got into the clouds out of the soaking drizzle, we entered a solid wall of rain. Our tents and bedding were sodden: the fuel we had taken up was barely enough for cooking and we were to camp above the juniper limit. Everything pointed to a persistent tide of the monsoon. Nevertheless, Diana rode on with a rapt look in her face, happy in the capitulation of the body to the spirit. We waited for the husband under a rock, which instead of sheltering us conspired with the rain in a deluge of waterspouts. Soon he appeared out of the mist. He was unconscious of any challenge. The pass for him was merely a passage from bad to worse —for the "hell" of his imagination was a cold and wet hell, a stony, misty, cheerless hell, in which one was always slipping or ascending. He faced Diana and asked her in tones charged with emotion to defend her philosophy. Was it flowers she sought? She had left them behind. Was it scenery? You would get as good a view if you put your head into a pail of smoke and water. Was it rheumatism or pneumonia? Here the camp arrived and added their moans to his declamation. Azizeh declared that only yesterday a man had died on the pass.

Diana said little. Her point of view was that if you were out for a thing you had to take the bad with the good; tomorrow might be fine. Her small and delicate body, poised in the saddle as she leant against the wind searching vainly for some physical argument to back her moral one, implied up the slope to the edge of the mountain a mile to the north and looked over. The whole valley of Kashmir was bathed in opal and amber and gold. But it was only for a few moments. The powers of darkness were getting the upper hand. The glow of silver on the Wular lake under Haramokh faded to a dull lead. Soon "the purpureal gleams" of Erebus had dispossessed all light and the thick blanket of cloud that had wrought the transformation was almost on our heads. We hurried back to the camp, little knowing that we had witnessed the last innings of the sun for five days.

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Diana said little. Her point of view was that if you were out for a thing you had to take the bad with the good; tomorrow might be fine. Her small and delicate body, poised in the saddle as she leant against the wind searching vainly for some physical argument to back her moral one, implied a lack of sporting instinct in the man who took his thwackings so badly. But this was illogical. The man's mind pivoted on the dry rock of common sense; the question of victory or defeat had not entered his head; it was a question of an existence of relative sanity below the clouds or a week in hell for fourteen human beings and as many beasts. Suddenly Diana yielded–to his misery rather than his persuasion. Whereupon the man became the spur, fearing her after-scorn. He swore by the gods that he would "stick it out," that he would go on and "see it through." But the woman swung her pony's head downhill. In a moment she was descending, he ascending and crying out, "I am going on. I am going on." I stood between.

My sympathies were with Diana. It was hard on her that she had not been born a boy; she looked one; in her breeches she reminded me of half a dozen young subalterns that I knew. Her relations, men and women, had shot, wandered, collected and climbed all over the world–yet for eleven months in the year her business was with babies. As the man's voice became fainter in the mist I feared a permanent breach, but I knew neither her nor him, nor the foundations on which this frail superstructure of antagonism, was built.

Diana consenting, I mounted and pursued the man, but he would not return at first, thinking that I was her messenger and accomplice and playing a part. He pictured the ghost of Diana's thwarted desires sitting between them at meals in after years. But I repeated his own sentiments – which I now shared–with such conviction that he warmed to me. The excelsior business, we agreed, was insanity. These monsoon currents generally lasted ten days. Especially do they dog one with a persistent hate, after a long unnatural interval of calm such as we had enjoyed in the July of 1917. We should not be able to see a yard in front of our faces or to warm or dry ourselves at night; and the men would grouse all the while and probably die or go sick out of spite. If it were Lhasa or Mecca or Rima or Lake Van or the Brahmaputra falls, it might be worth it–but a few dirty little lakes a bare three marches from Gulmarg! Thus basely did I profane Diana's Elysian fields behind her back.

So we descended and to our joy the clouds rolled down behind us in pursuit, gathering in volume. If there had been any break or truce in them during the next few days, it would have been an irony that two of us could ill have borne.

In the evening we were camped on a spur between two margs, where the roots of the pines gave us dry ground. We kept an enormous fire blazing in the shade, where we could warm ourselves and dry our tents and beds and clothes. The smoke, a little bluer than the mist, hung over the gujjars camp in the dip to the left, where they were cooking their meal on the yellow ragwort carpet. The rain ceased to pelt, but above and below us we could watch the sallies and hesitations of the storm and the clouds. A torrent thundered on our right, for a long time concealed until the curtain lifted slowly, unveiling the forest and the marg above it where the round patches of juniper recalled the dark green house leek growing on grey lichened tiles. The clouds rose higher, until a section of the main range was exposed under an arch of sky. We saw that we were camped under Tatakuti (15,500 feet), a bold rock peak with a single band of snow bisecting it under a protecting buttress. For a moment we had a suspicion that it was going to clear, but the curtain fell again, rolling down the hill with a stage-like finality that reassured us. Far away to the north and east over the valley of Kashmir there was a sunlit patch of sky, which broadened and glittered and called us down to the plain. As it grew dark Diana and I watched the mountains anxiously and looked up at the bank of clouds, fearing a break in the grey. So long as the sullen canopy was spread over the hills, we knew that it had been God's veto and not the man's.

The night was still and heavy, but rainless. The sweet homely scent of wet elder entered our tents. The pines pierced the black roof of the sky over the camp fire, beautiful mysterious dark columns merging into a vaguer blackness. We boiled our coffee and smoked our pipes and cigarette and basked in the blaze. The man and I talked. He told me some of his spiritual adventures. He too had been a wanderer, not in the mountains but in the cities and plains—in Turkey, Italy and Greece and the isles of the Aegean—unearthing antiquities, deciphering manuscripts, checking the inaccuracies of Strabo in Anatolia, a guest of the monks at Athos, reviling the declivity and the fleas. Oreophobia was a disease with him. The mountains were for animals, he said; he liked his flowers tame; and there was a dearth of interest in ground unconsecrated by man. Above all, he hated gradients that would not submit to wheels. The woman spoke once or twice, addressing him as "As-is-easier," her adaptation in the comparative degree of the name Azizeh, the tiffin-coolie, who always chose the easier part. The man admitted a common Horatian sentiment shared with this philosopher. "Video meliora proboque," he quoted, "deteriora sequor." Diana doubted the seeing and approving of either; the downhill bias, she thought, was very apt. She quoted "The Grammarian's Funeral." Each was the complement of the other, so there could be no rift.

The talk veered back to Athos and thence to fleas—the man was sent to see that the ponymen had not put the pack-saddles under her bed—Greek fleas, Kashmir fleas, Greek and Kashmir wine, Greek degeneracy, the beauty of Greek and Kashmir women, the beauty of the women in Gulmarg. Diana was silent, but palpably happy and reconciled. When at midnight she turned into her tent she scanned the heavens and murmured thankfully, "Not a star."

III

In spite of our investment by the clouds we enjoyed life in our camp on the ridge between the two margs. I was content, because we were camping in a cool green place thousands of miles from the desert and the smell of a pinewood fire invaded my tent. The man was happy because he had his books and he had not got to move and Diana was happy because she had found some rare orchids and lousewort under the pines and had painted half a dozen unfamiliar species into her Himalayan diary, which had reached its fifth volume and which was made up of illustrations with nothing written in it except the names of the flowers and when and where they grew. She had the necessary love and cunning for this work and each of her volumes was worth fifty collections of dead plants.

But after two days and nights in the mist we plunged like sun-worshippers down the mountain-side on to the plateau a thousand feet above the Jhelum valley, where the villages nestle in the folded bases of the hills embowered in trees, where every stream is a willow avenue and most garden walls a screen of slender white poplars, where brooks race through flowery meadows and the edges of the fields are borders of balsam, larkspur and scabious. We came down through the forest into English flowers and English summer weather, into a clime where neither the sun nor the clouds had it all their own way, but where, as in Davidson's poem, the sun was adventurous and the clouds scattered largesses of rain and the generous issue of it was seen in the trees and crops and flowers.

The villages we came to, lying mostly in the dips of the plateau on the banks of streams, are not on a path that leads anywhere. One would only enter them, flying from the hills as we did, plunging down into the plain by any haphazard route. Our sudden appearance sent the children flying into the corn; the women took cover or hid their faces; the men regarded us as a passing show. The whole country was fat and fruitful. There were orchards and little watermills everywhere. In many of the villages there were Ziarats or graves of Muhammadan saints, often a simple hummock in a stone enclosure like a pound, shadowed by a great chinar with a heronry in its boughs and a jackdaw's nest in its bole; sometimes a two-storied house, with fretted and painted windows and hanging eaves also fretted, the upper floor cleared for prayer and the roof a garden of irises, as are all flats roofs in Kashmir. The villagers' houses have the roofs of English barns. They are the most purely pastoral houses I know—half granary, half byre, two or three-storied. The third and sometimes the second storey, supported by beams and pillars of brick, reveal the hoarded gleanings of the year stored in gigantic Ali Baba jars of fireclay, seven feet high, reaching from the floor almost to the ceiling. The storey below the fowls share with the husbandman, the wife, the distaff, the teeming progeny; and under them, on the ground floor, are the cows. These high thatched roofs, with their open lofts and granaries, are visible for miles among the generous spreading chinars.

The country was so rich and flowery and fruit-ful that even Diana, who had come out to conquer solitudes, was content. The man fell under the spell of ordered, communal life. He pointed to pumpkins and crops and a row of hollyhocks in a village, flowers that had been planted with intention by the owner of the house. Diana smiled at his awakened interest in plants, at his preference for the man-fed product.

"I believe you'd prefer a pumpkin to a gentian," she said.

The man defended the claims of the pumpkin with Aristotelian logic. He admitted that the gentian was a stranger to him, but he made a good case for the vegetable. Then he said that he liked wild flowers, but that "it spoilt them knowing their names" and Diana and I were down on him like a ton of bricks. A lover of flowers, yet not interested in them enough to distinguish their names! A man who was content with humanity in the bulk might as well call himself a lover of people.

Flowers, Diana argued, like people, are endeared to us by their ways, their oddities, their personalities, their habits. It is impossible to enjoy them without knowing their names. She pointed to a meadow by a stream. "Just flowers," she remarked scornfully. "A pleasing botch of colour to the eye. No soul or individuality in them."

The man repeated that he was content with the general effect. It was "distinctly decorative." To him all the associations of texture, touch, habit, fragrance went for nothing. Diana, as she rode past, was aware of the downiness of the mullein, the musk-like smell that dwells in the stalk of the giant inula and issues like a protest if you bruise it, the virginal shrinking delicacy in flower and seed of the balsam—the seed that will spring from you like a grasshopper at the lightest touch of the finger. The smell and touch of these flowers afforded her delightful intimacies. The man saw the yellow mass of buttercups, potentilla, St John'swort, as one sees humanity in a crowd, unindividualized, whether brown, white or yellow. Diana could tell at a hundred yards that the butter-cup which chose that particularly marshy soil by the stream would be very erect and would have spear-shaped leaves growing up the stalk, unlike other buttercups; she knew that if she held up the St John'swort to the sky she would see the blue through a thousand little perforations in the leaf, only if the stalk were square and not round, the leaf would be opaque; and she knew the ways of the scarlet potentilla (Nepalensis), the loveliest eye in the meadow, which has shades one finds in the raiment of saints in stained-glass windows and sometimes in the skirt of a Kashmiri woman, but rarely in other flowers.

She picked one with white at the base of the petals. This she knew was only an expression of individual mood and had nothing to do with families or species. "Just like Nepalensis."

Diana returned to the analogy of flowers and people. Fancy going through life and thinking of men and women, if one thought of them separately at all, by a vague descriptive formula. "You don't want to know their names," she said to the man. "You might say the same about people and pretend you cared for them. Besides, the names themselves are beautiful." And she reminded him of an early infatuation. "Fancy, if you wanted to recall Daphne, speaking of her as 'that plump girl with the engaging freckles and the corn-coloured air that I took into dinner at X's!'"

All day long the truth of Diana's argument was borne in upon me. It might be literally accurate, but it would be spiritually untrue to say that—to Diana's senses—the rose would smell as sweet by another name. Certainly the thyme and willow herb and meadowsweet would lose half their fragrance under an alias. And colour would fade, too, without the intimacy that names suggest. I agreed with Diana that even the Latin names of flowers are beautiful and suggestive. Yet one is sometimes taxed with pedantry for being familiar with them. What could be better than *Impatiens noli me tangere* for the balsam? Who could be indifferent to *Circoea*, the enchanter's nightshade, when it has been pointed out to him by name or the *Chrysosplenium* in the bed of the mountain stream? There are dainty, modest, inconspicuous flowers whose individuality would be unremembered or forgotten altogether without their Latin name.

The man missed much in the mere associations which flowers evoke in the same way as music and smells. He did not know that he had been stumbling through Daphne in the forest all the way down from the camp on the marg. And now, as we descended farther into the plain, we met the homely water flowers that grow in the bed or on the bank of every English stream—meadowsweet, loosestrife, arrowhead, water plantain, even Butomus, the flowering rush. The bows of his boat must often have nosed them on the Isis and the Cher, but he was greeted by no familiar spirits blowing their elfin horns, waking echoes, conjuring up the old haunts, the old delights, the old desires.

Other voices were calling him. As we descended, the man became a thruster, a pioneer. He was the engine now, not the brake. He hustled the servants and blew impatient shrill blasts on his whistle summoning the gujjars to strike camp. He loosened the tent pegs and lent a hand at loading the ponies. He was for long marches and early starts. His companions were provokingly, maliciously dilatory. On the last morning he almost pulled the tent about Diana's ears as she was painting an uncommon balsam in her diary.

Gulmarg received us under a sky mercifully leaden and forbidding, emphatic in its veto. We arrived sodden and content. We had been wise—we had sought the sun where we could find it; and now that it was nowhere to be found, we were back again by a log fire under a roof. In the last march Diana had found more flowers than she could paint in two days; the man's spirits had risen as he forsook the vertical for the horizontal; but I was probably the best contented of the three. After Mesopotamia I desired Arcadia and the bad weather had driven us down into the haunts of pastoral peace. It was like a plunge from Nietzsche to Theocritus and we had camped among the only people I had met since 1914 who were not destroying or directly or indirectly aiding destruction or mending what others destroyed, who were not even aware of the disease of war.

The man and I had fallen into the pre-Georgian way of looking at peaks—he because of their associations with discomfort, I because I did not find in them the true and perfect antithesis of Mesopotamia. The antithesis of outline and feature was not enough. I craved for the antithesis of spirit, not merely a vertical instead of a flat desolation. Bare mountain tops will never appear frightful and depressing again as they did to our ancestors. Yet among the changes wrought by the war in the human spirit there may come a preference for the sylvan and pastoral upper places. We loved wildness when there was peace and sought it. Now, we have had our fill of savagery, it will not be strange if a bias enters our spirit and turns us from what is wild and wasteful in nature to the old Arcadian haunts of Pan and the shepherds.

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On the edge of the World

Travels in
KASHMIR & CENTRAL ASIA

The first two-thirds of this book were written before the war, the last third in Mesopotamia, where, every summer, the heat is so intense that it compels a natural armistice.

Operations of war sometimes took us into the hills, but this was generally in the cold weather. Those who escaped after May from the fire pit on the Tigris to the Zagros range in Persia, who camped under the snowy peaks of Perau and Bisotun or who beheld distant Demavend, were doubly blessed. For a sojourn in the accursed Biblical land will have made any love they may have had for the mountains so much the stronger.

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Cover Designed by Savio Advertising, New Delhi

ISBN 978-81-8339-207-5
₹1295
9 788183 392075
US$ 39